

Selected Writings on the Spiritual Life

by ST. PETER DAMIAN

*A comprehensive edition of the
works of a leading medieval mystic
translated with an introduction
by Patricia McNulty*

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With the publication of this volume—the first translation of the works of St. Peter Damian into a modern language—the great hiatus in the mystical tradition between Gregory the Great and St. Bernard of Clairvaux is closed. One of the most dynamic figures of the eleventh century, Damian was noted for a life of holy simplicity in the midst of high responsibility in church affairs. His profoundly devout and wide-ranging writings stand as a testimony to the spirituality of his age, a crucial one in the thought and life of the church.

This Italian Cardinal was not only an ecclesiastical statesman but a leader of the reform movement in the monasteries and in the papacy. He was a compassionate and understanding spiritual adviser to laymen, anticipating later writers in his belief that all men, not only a chosen few, could and should aspire to

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St. Peter Damian

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ST. PETER DAMIAN

Selected Writings on the Spiritual Life

translated with an Introduction

by

PATRICIA MCNULTY

HARPER & BROTHERS

Publishers

New York

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Printed in Great Britain

AD MEMORIAM
PATRIS CARISSIMI

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Preface

It is difficult to find in any western spiritual writer between St. Gregory the Great and St. Bernard a systematic treatment of the theory of the contemplative life. Yet during the six centuries still called 'dark' the tradition established by Augustine and Gregory lived and grew in the monasteries of the West which preserved so much for us; secretly and quietly, it is true, but nevertheless handed down with many other precious things to the high middle ages. Its chief exponent in the eleventh century was St. Peter Damian. Although he wrote no treatise on the contemplative life as such, his writings are strewn with references to the contemplative and ascetic lives, and from them it is possible to piece together his theory of contemplation.

I have chosen three of his treatises and some sermons which seem to me to illustrate his theories most clearly. The treatises are numbers 11, 13 and 58 according to Gaetani's numbering, and are entitled 'The Book of "The Lord be with you",' 'On the Perfection of Monks' and 'Concerning True Happiness and Wisdom'. I have also tried to analyse the principles underlying his spirituality. If the result resembles that humble bunch of herbs which Damian describes as being given by the impecunious man to his creditor in lieu of payment the fault is mine, not his. His contemplative writings may be as the flowers of the hedgerow in comparison with those of St. Bernard or Richard of St. Victor, but they are indeed beautiful to those who have patience to follow his winding lanes.

In translating from the Bible I have used the Authorized Version wherever possible; otherwise I have had recourse to Mgr. R. A. Knox's translation of the Vulgate. Where Damian's text differs from both of these, I have made my own version.

PREFACE

It gives me great pleasure to acknowledge the unfailing help and encouragement of Professor J. M. Hussey and the generous advice and assistance of my friends and colleagues Miss N. P. Miller and Miss I. Hyde.

INTRODUCTION

1. St. Peter Damian's Life and Background

The eleventh century was a notable and crucial age in the history of the Western Church. The great figures of that time, Hildebrand and Leo IX, Desiderius of Monte-Cassino and Lanfranc, Humbert of Silva-Candida, and Peter Damian himself, in his own time Cardinal-Bishop of Ostia and now recognized as a Doctor of the Church, are in stature as mighty and in influence as far-reaching as any of the great ecclesiastics of the high middle ages.

Damian's life-span covered almost the whole of the first three-quarters of the eleventh century. The chief sources for our knowledge of his life and work are his own writings and the contemporary *vita* written by his friend and disciple John of Lodi; these are supplemented by a few charters and other documents relating to the Congregation of Fonte Avellana, one or two papal letters, signatures to papal documents and isolated references in contemporary chronicles.

The writings of Peter Damian were first edited early in the seventeenth century by Dom Costantino Gaetani.¹ Later work has brought to light only four letters and two manuscripts unknown to Gaetani, and these have since been published.² Most of the charters relating to the Congregation of Fonte Avellana were published by Mittarelli and Costadoni in the *Annales Camaldulenses*.

The documents which form the basis of any study of

¹ This is the edition used by Migne, *Patrologia Latina* 144 and 145, which is at present the only available printed version. A critical edition of Damian's works is urgently needed.

² V. J. Leclercq, 'Les inédits de S. Pierre Damien' in *Revue Bénédictine*, 67, 1957.

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Damian's life and thought are, therefore, by nature biographical and subjective, lacking the lapidary impersonality of the administrative document or the inscription. The body of letters and sermons is distinguished in the first place by its literary quality, testifying as it does to an astonishing mastery of the Latin tongue and an unusual combination of passion and Christian spirituality which have caused Damian to be compared to St. Jerome. Damian's correspondents include every pope from Gregory VI to Alexander II and the most celebrated leaders of the contemporary reform movement: Humbert of Silva-Candida, Archdeacon Hildebrand, Desiderius of Monte-Cassino, Hugh of Cluny and Anno of Cologne, as well as great lay persons like the Empress Agnes and the Emperor Henry III, and Godfrey, Duke of Tuscany, his wife Beatrice and their daughter Matilda. He wrote to all of them concerning the religious and moral crises of his day, advising, exhorting and not infrequently castigating. But Damian was not only a counsellor of popes and princes; he was a loving father to his monks, and an affectionate and prudent kinsman and friend. His vast correspondence shows us every facet of his often bewildering and enigmatic, but always impressive and attractive, personality.

Peter Damian was born in the city of Ravenna, the ancient capital of Theodoric the Ostrogoth and of the Byzantine exarch after the Italian province had been recaptured by Justinian's generals. Throughout its history the city had been famous for its connections with and loyalty to the *imperium*; not only to the glorious Emperors of the East, who had created and adorned its splendour, but also to their barbarian usurpers and successors. This loyalty had its roots in enlightened self-interest; it was based on the claims of the archbishops of Ravenna to metropolitan rank and complete independence of the Roman See.

With the coming of the Ottonian Emperors to Italy, the factors which had contributed to the importance of this great city emerged once more. The Frankish rulers wanted a firm foothold in the north; and the archbishops of Ravenna were perfectly prepared to support Ottonian pretensions to imperial power in exchange for local independence. When Arnold, half-

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brother to the Emperor Henry II, was placed by his imperial kinsman on the archiepiscopal throne Ravenna attained her fullest independence and the height of her imperialism.

But the Ravenna into which Damian was born was notable for other things besides its traditional imperial leanings. It was the seat of a distinguished school of learning, the most celebrated of whose sons had perhaps been the poet Venantius Fortunatus. And it had produced within a short span of time three men devoted to the eremitic ideal: Damian himself, St. Romuald, the *fons et origo* of the north Italian eremitic movement, and John of Fécamp, nephew of the great monastic reformer William of Volpiano, distinguished abbot of a famous house, friend and counsellor of the Empress Agnes, and author of the moving 'Deploratio Quietis et Solitudinis Derelictae'. These aspects of eleventh-century Ravenna—its imperial leanings and tendency to independence of the Papacy, its learned tradition and the fact that it was the birthplace of several men devoted to the ideal of the solitary life—must have had a profound influence on Damian.

It was in or about January 1007 that Damian was born into an already large family, a late and not altogether welcome arrival. His biographer gives us a lively account of the family reaction: 'When his mother brought him, her last child, into the world, one of her sons, already well-advanced into adolescence, cried out in complaint: "For shame! There are already so many of us that the house will scarcely hold us; and what a discrepancy there is between the number of heirs and the narrow inheritance!"' Both parents died when Peter was a young child, and he was cared for and educated by his elder brother Damian, whose name he afterwards adopted as a sign of filial affection; for Damian's love for his youngest brother seems to have exceeded even that of a father. Certainly he gave him the best education that he could provide. Peter Damian spent fifteen years of his life, from his thirteenth to his twenty-eighth year, learning and teaching in the schools of northern Italy. It may therefore be not out of place to give some account of these schools.

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Scholarship and learning in Italy had suffered the same vagaries and been threatened by the same perils as in the other western regions during the early medieval centuries. Liberal studies had to face two great enemies: the barbarian invaders and a powerful group within the Church itself whose attitude to secular studies might be described as intellectual Manichaeism. But there were two factors at work in Italy which modified the effects of these perils and gave to the Italian schools of the middle ages a character of their own. The first of these was the fact that in Italy Roman civilization and culture were ancient and deeply-rooted. The second, which was a consequence of this, was that education in Italy never became a clerical prerogative. The line of succession between the imperial schools of rhetoric and the medieval *scholae publicae* remained unbroken. Whereas the barbarians of the north and west made use of the Church to impose a civilization which was alien to them, those who entered Italy were absorbed imperceptibly by a culture which was strong enough to survive the assaults which they made upon it and to assimilate those forces which at one time threatened to extinguish it.

In the eleventh century the centre of Italian learning and culture lay in the north. The school of Parma was the most famous in northern and central Italy, being particularly celebrated for its teachers of grammar and law. Among its distinguished grammarians at this time were Homodei and Theodulf, while Drogo, Geizo and Azo all taught jurisprudence; it boasted, too, a celebrated astronomer, Hugo. At Faenza, the school was ruled over by the grammarian Rainerius. The school of Ravenna had risen under the great Gerbert (later Pope Sylvester II) to a position of importance. Law was studied there, and its famous grammarian Vilgardus achieved notorious mention in the chronicle of Ralph Glaber, who mentions in passing the addiction of the Italians to the study of grammar and poetry. In 1023, the school was in charge of Petrus Scholasticus, and it is reasonable to assume that he had some hand in Damian's education.

It would be logical, therefore, to suppose that Damian's

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studies were chiefly concerned with grammar, rhetoric and law, and his writings everywhere support such a conclusion. The style and content of his work show an intimate knowledge of and unusual ability in the subjects of the *trivium*, and he is familiar with both civil and canon law. His vast scriptural and theological knowledge, however, have their roots in a later period of his life when he first went to Fonte Avellana.

Throughout his student days and during the short time which he spent teaching in the school at Ravenna Damian lived a life of great austerity, devoting himself to prayer and penance. But his was not a nature to be satisfied with half-measures, and he soon abandoned his successful teaching career, having decided that for him the only way of salvation lay in renunciation of the world. His conversion profoundly affected his attitude to secular learning; or perhaps it would be truer to say that it brought to the surface a latent quality in his spirit. This reaction against worldly learning had a twofold basis: the violence of his temperament almost inevitably meant that he did everything by extremes; but at the same time, when he entered the eremitic community at Fonte Avellana he became heir to an established ascetic tradition of mistrust of the wise ones of this world. This mistrust had its roots in the early history of the Church, when Christianity had everything to fear from the pagan philosophers and their teachings. Fortunately for the future of the western world, this attitude gradually died out. But it persisted in certain quarters, and its great stronghold was the ascetic mind. St. Jerome and St. Gregory both epitomize it: the former when he quotes the angel's condemnation, 'Ciceronianus es, non Christianus', and the latter when he writes to Desiderius of Vienne: 'In uno ore cum Iovis laudibus laudes Christi non capiunt.' Such sentiments as these were not confined to the barbarian West; they are echoed in the writings of eastern ascetics like Symeon the New Theologian. They illustrate the intellectual dualism to be found throughout Christendom.

It is easy to exaggerate Damian's anti-scholastic tendencies. In his attitude to secular learning he was inconsistent; for in

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spite of his condemnation of the 'stulti sapientes' of the schools, he put his nephew Damian under the care of a Frankish abbot whom he asked to send him back wedded to the twin brides of the *trivium* and *quadrivium*. Nevertheless, he had no condemnation too strong for monks who occupied themselves with secular studies: 'those who join the crowd of grammarians, and forsaking spiritual studies desire to learn the follies of worldly knowledge; who think little of the rule of Benedict and find their pleasure in the rules of Donatus'.¹ And he says to his own brethren: 'Would that you were unable to say: "The laws of Justinian are better to us than any gold or silver."' The study of grammar, which involved a deep knowledge of the pagan poets, and of civil law, which aroused too great an interest in worldly affairs, seemed to him to be contrary to the true monastic spirit, and wholly irrelevant to the goal of the monastic life: the vision of God. 'Who lighteth a lantern that he may see the sun, or candles that he may behold the glory of the stars?'

His years of teaching at Ravenna brought to a close the first half of Damian's life; when he entered the monastery of Fonte Avellana in 1035 he was nearly thirty years of age. He brought to his new vocation a powerful and trained intelligence, a temperament at once violent and austere and a fierce zeal for his own holiness and for the salvation of others. It would seem too that he brought a reputation for austerity and piety, since we are told by his biographer that as soon as he asked for admittance to the monastery of Fonte Avellana he was assigned to a spiritual director, and very soon afterwards clothed with the cowl, the symbol of full membership of the community, which was not usually worn until after a period of probation. Perhaps the small and struggling community wished to make sure that Damian did not leave them too swiftly; the brilliant young teacher from Ravenna would have been an adornment to any of the great houses of his day.

¹ Aelius Donatus was the most celebrated grammarian of the fourth century and the master of St. Jerome. He wrote two treatises on grammar, the *Ars Minor* and the *Ars Major*, which were standard text-books in the medieval schools.

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Damian's own writings and John's life of him give a clear picture of his early years at Fonte Avellana. From the moment of his entry his austere zeal for ascetic practices and his intentness in prayer astounded his brethren. The monks lived two by two in cells 'unremitting in spiritual combat both by night and day, armed with the indefeasible weapons of psalmody, prayer, reading, abstinence and obedience'.¹ On four days of the week they ate nothing but bread, water and salt, supplemented on the other three by a few vegetables which they cooked for themselves in their cells; wine was used only for the Holy Sacrifice and for the sick. They went barefoot within the hermitage winter and summer alike.

The house of Fonte Avellana lay then, as its deserted buildings do today, on the lower slopes of Mount Catria, a lofty Apennine peak which stands some fifteen miles north-west of the episcopal city of Gubbio, in a wild and beautiful countryside. In the eleventh century the building consisted of a church (its crypt still remains) and cloister, a scriptorium and other offices, and, close to the church, the cells in which some of the brethren lived in pairs. Further afield, scattered on the higher slopes, must have stood the cells of those who lived a life of strict seclusion, and who only left their solitude to join in the common worship of the community on Sundays and great feasts.

The community consisted of three groups: the professed brethren, of whom some at least were priests, and who lived either as recluses in the more distant cells or, if their duties demanded it, in the monastic cells close to the church; the novices, each of whom was placed under the tutelage of one of the brethren, who instructed him in spiritual discipline and was responsible for his welfare; and the lay-brethren who performed most of the manual labour. Most of Damian's monastic experience was as a member of the first group: that is to say, either as a recluse or as an official of the community living a quasi-monastic life.

There were probably not more than a dozen *reclusi* at any

¹John of Lodi, *Vita Beati Petri Damiani*, c.5.

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one time. They spent their days in their cells except on Sundays and important feasts, when they took part in the liturgical worship of the community. These rough wooden or stone cells contained only the barest necessities: a straw palliase, a rough bench and table, and a few cooking utensils and tools, together with such books as were necessary: a psalter, a breviary and a text from the scriptorium for spiritual reading. Their day was spent in the recitation of the Divine Office, private prayer, reading and manual labour. The problems raised by the recitation of the public prayer of the church in solitude were very real and troublesome to some of the hermits, and it was to resolve their difficulties that Damian wrote the *Liber de Dominus Vobiscum* which is translated here. Besides the general task of liturgical prayer, it was the custom of the congregation to recite daily the whole of the psalter for the faithful on earth, and as much as possible of a second psalter for the faithful departed. The recitation of the canonical hours and this dual reading of the psalter must have occupied a very considerable proportion of their waking hours, probably six or seven hours daily. They spent about two hours a day in reading and another two or three in manual labour. The type of manual labour performed depended on individual aptitude; Damian himself spent much time in writing and in correcting the codices in the scriptorium, while John of Lodi was an active copier of manuscripts. The purpose of such labour was not material, but spiritual benefit: it was an aid to concentration and warded off the attacks of the noonday devil of *acedia* or despondency. It is possible that on fast-days no manual labour was performed; the time thus saved was probably spent in private prayer and meditation.

Those of the brethren who lived two in a cell, close to the church, led a life similar in its essentials to that of the recluses, the chief difference being that they sang the canonical hours in choir. This demanded a slightly less austere régime, since the proper performance of the *opus Dei* could not be combined with the incredibly severe fasts of the solitaries. Besides, this group had other duties to perform, since it included the

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officers of the monastery, the directors of the novices and the novices themselves.

The monastery of St. Andrew was, when Damian entered it, struggling for its very existence, and this situation continued until after he became prior. At that time he wrote to the archbishop of Ravenna: 'In taking upon myself the government of this poor little place I, who was previously poor in myself alone, am now poor also in the persons of all those whom I rule. I know what it is to be responsible for others and to lack the means of supplying their needs.' But the necessary austerities imposed by the harsh way of life and the indigence of the Avellanese community did not satisfy Damian's hunger for mortification; he added to the prescribed penitences and abstinences many others, until his health was gravely weakened. The chief cause of damage seems to have been lack of sleep, which brought about some sort of violent headache and fever. When he had recovered from this illness he moderated his ascetical practices and spent the time thus saved in equipping himself with a knowledge of the scriptures and of theology.

It was hardly to be expected that no demands would be made upon such learning and holiness; all his life, Damian's abilities and zeal were to take him on weary journeys and into uncongenial environments on the business of the Church and for the salvation of others, when he himself wished only to be quiet in his cell, among his books, following without interruption those ways which would bring him at last to rest in the contemplation of the Godhead. His inevitable future was very soon apparent. First he was commanded by the prior to preach to his own brethren; then, as his reputation spread, the heads of nearby houses asked that he be sent to their monasteries to instruct the brethren. So he went, at the request of Abbot Guido, to Pomposa, 'to supply the brethren with the nourishment of the holy word'. Here he remained for two years, until recalled to Fonte Avellana by the prior. He also spent some time at the monastery of St. Vincent, similarly engaged in teaching and preaching. On his second return to his own house

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he was made procurator, and after the death of his master about 1042 he became prior in his stead.

The accession of Peter Damian to the priorate marked a new beginning for the hitherto unimportant Avellanese community, which now embarked upon a period of expansion and prosperity. His fame as a teacher and reformer had brought Damian into contact with many important laymen and clerics, and these men and women became the benefactors of his house. New recruits came to Mount Catria, among them John of Lodi himself; and Damian went on to found hermitages elsewhere; at Suavicina, near Camerino, at Sitria and Monte Acuto near Gubbio, at Acereta and Gamugnio near Faenza, at Campo-reggiano, near Perugia, and at Murciano near Rimini. He presided over and regularly visited this congregation of monasteries and hermitages until his death; his rule, even when the pressure of business meant that it had to be exercised through delegates, was absolute and fatherly, as his letters to various houses and their heads and the surviving charters of this period show. But Fonte Avellana itself remained his home and held his special affection. John of Lodi tells us: 'He visited the house and community of the Holy Cross at Fonte Avellana as often as he could, for it was dearer to him than all others. He could not forget those with whom he had dwelt from the beginning of his life in religion, and whom the Master's command had committed to his care.'

But the times were too critical, and Damian's own zeal and ability too great, for him to remain in the quiet of Fonte Avellana ruling his congregation and pursuing the way of perfection in solitude. The crisis in the Church was approaching its peak, and it was not in Damian's nature to rest in a backwater and watch the main current of affairs flowing past him, however deeply he may have desired such seclusion. Already in the early years of his priorate he had emerged as one of the leading ecclesiastical figures of northern Italy, corresponding with Gregory VI and Clement II about the needs of the Ravennese province, and welcoming with joy the reforming activities of the Emperor Henry III in the north. Nor was he unaware,

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even at this time, of the wider issues at stake. His earliest recorded letter, written to the cardinal deacon Peter, shows that the central issue of reform was clear to him: 'Unless the Roman See returns to the right way it is certain that the whole world will remain in error. And it is necessary that she who was the foundation of the development of human salvation should also be the source of its renewal.'¹ But he did not yet see this problem as one of liberating the papacy from imperial control, and perhaps he was never to do so; for he knew German cesaropapism only at its best, in the persons of Henry III and the saintly Empress Agnes. Nevertheless, although his conception of the relationship of the two powers was Gelasian, and although he could never have subscribed to the theocratic idea of papal government expressed by such men as Innocent IV, Damian was one of the most ardent supporters of the reformed papacy, for it was as clear to him as to any of his contemporaries that the Church could only be saved from within and above. It was partly a certain political innocence and naïveté which led him to believe that Pope and Emperor could and should work in unruffled concord to bring Christ's body back to its proper and pristine state. The problems raised by tangled and conflicting interests, of Pope and Emperor, Norman and German, Godfrey of Lorraine and Anno of Cologne, did not concern him. But there was more than this in his attitude. Himself so single-mindedly concerned for the things of God and of the spirit, he was reluctant to believe that others' desires and interests were less admirable. For so eminent a legate and cardinal, one who had close contacts both with the papal curia and with leading laymen, he retained a surprising amount of holy simplicity.

Damian's prestige was not sufficiently high at the time of the accession of Leo IX to the pontificate in 1049 for him to be called in immediately as an indispensable helper in the work of the reformed papal court. He probably made his first appearances at the annual synods of this time as a right-minded supporter of the new ecclesiastical policy from the north; and once

¹*Epistolae* lib. ii, 19. P.L. 144, 288.

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he had made an entry his talents did the rest. It is clear from his sermons and letters that he had a genius for hortatory preaching which, combined with his obvious sincerity and goodness, must have been both irresistible and terrifying. And we know that he was not afraid to speak his mind to any man on earth when an issue of moral principle was involved; the Roman pontiff and the German ruler were no exceptions to this rule. The 'monitor of the popes' as he has been called, used his literary powers to good advantages in Leo's pontificate and contributed two important treatises to the repertory of reform, each dealing with one of the two great evils of his time: clerical immorality and simony. The *Liber Gomorrhianus* painted an appalling picture of the decay and degeneracy of the priesthood, while the *Liber Gratissimus* was a reasoned and charitable contribution to one of the difficult and controversial problems of the age: the validity of simoniacal orders. It is, however, possible that both writings aroused opposition in papal circles, the first by its outspokenness and the second because it conflicted with the views of the eminent Lorraine reformer Cardinal Humbert of Silva-Candida, who held that ordinations administered by simoniacs were invalid. Such opposition may account for the comparative neglect of Damian by Leo during the later years of his pontificate; on the other hand, this may be due to the fact that the Pope was absent from Italy for long periods during this time.

Peter Damian emerged once again from his retirement during the pontificate of Stephen IX (1057-58). At this time the influence of his friend Hildebrand was growing at Rome, and it would seem that he was responsible for Damian's elevation to the cardinal-bishopric of Ostia by Stephen. Damian himself was extremely reluctant to take upon himself the pastoral care and the press of administrative business involved in the charge of the senior cardinal-bishopric and membership of the Sacred College; it appears that he only yielded to Stephen's demand under threat of excommunication. This honour took him another step away from that solitude and recollection which were for him the instruments of spiritual perfection. But it is

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to his credit that he did not stand aside or refuse to aid the Roman Church in her need. The see of Ostia itself called for little of his time; it was a decaying seaport which had declined still further during the Saracen harryings of the Italian coast; perhaps if it had been a more adequate field for his labours Damian would have been less anxious to resign his charge there in order to return to his monastery. This desire of his to leave his diocese was not, however, to be satisfied until Alexander II's time, and even then he was not relieved of his duties as bishop and cardinal, as his legatine work and his own letters clearly show. He wrote to Alexander in 1063: 'You have said that I should not, because of my great desire for the life of contemplation, neglect to write to you from time to time. As far as you are concerned, venerable father, who have agreed to the laying down of my episcopal burden, I would indeed have leisure for both contemplation and letter-writing, but I am never free from the press of business. It is true that my cell is a haven to me, and that when I am there I have found the safety of the shore. But to what end? For when I am there, desiring only tranquillity and peace, and thinking myself safe, I am smitten by the winds of this savage world and overwhelmed more than ever by the rising tide of affairs. . . . Those who require counsel for their souls' health are not lacking; what is still harder, men still strive to extract a pontifical decision from me, who am no longer a bishop. All my endeavour takes place within the walls of such troubles; I strive, but my strength is almost at an end. I cannot reach the heights of contemplation; I do not burst into tears of compunction. My mind, overshadowed by the darkness of worldly affairs, endeavours in vain to reach the heights of contemplation; it is weighed down by the business of this world as if with piles of stones.'¹ He paid a heavy price for his work among the reformers.

Damian's work as legate began in 1059, when he was sent by Pope Nicholas II to Milan to deal with the difficult situation which had arisen there as a result of the growth of a popular

¹ *Epistolae* lib. 15. P.L. 144, 225-6.

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movement for clerical reform. The opposition of the Patarines, as the popular party was called, to the worldly lives of the Milanese clergy, who were frequently both simoniac and married, had become an open revolt. His work as papal legate (a task which he shared with Anselm of Lucca, later Pope Alexander II) was complicated by the traditional hostility of the Church of Milan, which had always claimed an Ambrosian independence, to any interference from Rome. By his splendid oratory Damian convinced the Milanese of the justice of the claim of the papacy to intervene in the affairs of local churches: 'What province of all the kingdoms of the earth lies outside her authority? . . . All patriarchs, all metropolitans, all bishoprics, and the dignities of all the churches were established by kings or emperors or other men; their special powers were given them by those men according to their power or desire to do so; He who founded the Church of Rome on the rock of the newborn faith was He who gave to the keeper of the keys of life everlasting the rights of heavenly and earthly rule.'¹ Having won their respect, Damian proceeded to deal mercifully with the Milanese clergy, putting into practice the principles concerning simoniacal orders which he had expressed in the *Liber Gratissimus*. And, as J. P. Whitney has pointed out,² he was glad of an opportunity to bring pressure to bear on the bishops, who had been too easily pardoned in the past by the popes. Shortly afterwards, in April 1059, Damian was present at the Lateran synod which proclaimed the famous Election decree, asserting the right of the cardinal clergy, and no others, to make elections to the See of Peter. He was one of the witnesses to this important document.

After the death of Nicholas II in 1061 there was another ecclesiastical crisis. An antipope, Cadalus of Parma, had been elected in opposition to Alexander II, and Damian wrote several letters in the next few years castigating this 'evil priest, the ruin of the people'. 'Were you born', he asks him, 'to wage war on the world, to destroy the work and labours of the

¹ *Actus Mediolanensis*. P.L. 145, 91.

² J. P. Whitney, *Hildebrandine Essays*, p. 140.

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Apostles, and to ruin the whole Church of Christ by your ambition?' He was a good friend to Alexander II, although his influence with that pope was probably eclipsed by that of Hildebrand, and relations between them were not always easy. The closeness of the friendship between Damian and Alexander is perhaps rather curiously illustrated by the fact that Damian spoke his mind even more frankly to him than to any other pope; when asked by Alexander why the lives of the bishops of Rome were usually so short, he replied that it was because the Lord wished to keep them properly humble. It was Alexander who despatched him, in 1063, to act as papal legate and settle the acrimonious dispute between the monastery of Cluny and Drogo, bishop of Macon. On behalf of the papacy Damian upheld Cluny's claim to exemption from episcopal visitation.

His third great legatine mission took place in 1069, when he was an ageing and frail man of sixty-two. He was sent by Alexander to Frankfurt, to prevent Henry IV from divorcing his wife Bertha. Again, his formidable combination of saintliness and oratorical power won the day. After this, for the last two years of his life, he was allowed to rest in peace at his beloved Fonte Avellana. None of his datable writings come from this period, but we may be allowed to believe that, having attained at last the leisure which he had so long desired and which he had freely sacrificed that the Church of God might be restored to her pristine purity, he found that peace and delight in the contemplation of the Godhead which were for him the end of all earthly striving. Yet he was not to die where he had longed to live. At the beginning of 1072 Alexander commanded him once more to undertake a legatine journey, this time to his own mother-church of Ravenna, which was in a not unusual state of turbulence and indiscipline. Once more he accomplished his work well, and having accomplished it died while journeying to Rome at the monastery of St. Mary at Faenza, entering at last into the joy of his Lord.

But Damian was more than an exhorter of monks and an ecclesiastical statesman. He was one of the first and greatest

advocates of the regular canonical life for cathedral clergy; he was a compassionate and understanding spiritual adviser to laymen, and anticipated the twelfth-century spiritual writers in his belief that all men, and not only a chosen few, could and should aspire to that life of perfection which had previously been regarded as the prerogative of the monk. He was the precursor of later devotion to the Blessed Virgin and to the Passion and Cross of Christ. He was, too, a considerable poet; his 'Hymnus de gloria paradisi' is singularly beautiful. He was many men in one, and sometimes we feel the conflict between them. Damian might well have said with Sir Thomas Browne: 'There is another man within me that is angry with me.'

Yet this apparently enigmatic man, fierce fighter for his cause and kind and tender friend and kinsman, scholarly scorner of the world's wisdom, hermit and cardinal, passionate ascetic, a man never sure of the love of any man, stood nevertheless on firm ground. The whole pattern of his life was determined, from the first vivid picture which we have of him dining with the blind beggar to his holy death, by that love of God which led him to seek His face while still within the body of this death. It is in his theory of the contemplative life that apparent contradictions are resolved.

2. *St. Peter Damian's Ascetical Teaching*

I. THE PURPOSE OF ASCETICISM

Christian asceticism is directed to one end, the enjoyment of the *visio Dei*, and the ascetic life can only be understood in relation to this end; therefore, if Damian's ascetical teaching is to be seen in its true light, it must be so considered. Was he a contemplative in the tradition of Augustine and Gregory? Were his incredible penances, his severe rule of life and his defence of flagellation the fruit of a burning love of God and a

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desire for the exquisite delight of mystic union, or was he in fact a cold, austere figure, a mere master of negative asceticism, a masochist with an almost Manichaean hatred of the flesh, as he has sometimes been pictured? It was not hardness of heart that led him to shun the delights of human society, for, as has rightly been said, it is not the man whose senses are blunt who makes the sternest ascetic. All his actions sprang from the fervour of his love for God; it was this that moulded his mind and character. He was in the truest sense a contemplative.

Dante Alighieri recognized this quality in him. The poet spent some time at Fonte Avellana, and could not fail to imbibe something of the spirit of its second founder. When, in the *Paradiso*, Damian draws near to the poet as he beholds Jacob's ladder, thronged with bright spirits, which stretches up from Saturn, the latter says to him: 'To veggio ben l'amor che tu m'accene', and the saint later describes his life at Fonte Avellana to Dante in the following words:

'... Quivi
al servizio di Dio mi fei sì fermo
che pur con cibi di liquor d'ulivi
lievemente passava caldi e gieli,
contento nei pensier contemplativi.'¹

Commenting on Dante's remarks, J. P. Whitney said: 'Damian is the type of the contemplative life which comes nearest to God, and is therefore most useful to man. If we take this as the centre of Damian's personality, all his activities and his writings fall into their proper place. Instead of accidental denunciations of corruptions and evils, isolated comments on theological or clerical life, we have a coherent whole, a full expression of a well-ordered personality. If to most people he is merely an ascetic, and a prophet of asceticism, he himself valued the ascetic life as a help to contemplation, and as necessary to ensure its perfection.'

But the best answer to the critics is Damian's own. At the beginning of the eighth chapter of the *De Perfectione Mona-*

¹ Dante, *Divina Commedia*, *Paradiso*, Canto xxi.

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chorum, he defines the purpose of the monastic life: 'Our whole new way of life and our renunciation of the world has but one end: rest. But a man can only come to this state of rest if he stretches his sinews in many labours and strivings, so that when all the clamour and disturbance is at an end the soul may be lifted up by the grace of contemplation to search for the very face of truth.' Who serves God, he asks, that he may endure toil and hardship and suffer temptation? All who seek God do so with one hope and expectation: that they may find rest, and sleep in the joys of contemplation as though in the arms of the lovely Rachel.

This, then, is the end of the religious life. For although Damian does not regard the grace of contemplation as the sole prerogative of those living the monastic life, he believes that it is most surely attained in the cloister. Men, like the children of Israel long ago, must go forth into the desert if they are to see the pillar of light which is Christ; and the body of monks has this in common with the wandering Hebrews. So he writes to the monks of Cluny: 'As a fiery light shone in the night's darkness upon those wandering in the desert, so those who dwell in spiritual monasteries are often lightened by the rays of a supernal light, which dispels the darkness of fleshly passions and bathes them in the brilliance of inward contemplation.'¹ The parallel is carried still further in his thought. For him, those who literally choose the desert, who seek the solitude of the hermitage, are putting themselves even more surely in the way of such grace than their cenobitic brethren. He believes that of all forms of religious life the eremitic is the most perfect; even when he praises the spirituality of Cluny, it is because its monks might almost be hermits. The contemplative must be a solitary at least in spirit; Damian holds, with Catherine of Siena, that knowledge of the Godhead does not come '*senza l'abitatione della cella del cuore e dell' anima nostra*'.

In what did contemplation consist for Peter Damian? Like all other great mystics, he desired union with God. The con-

¹ *Epistolae* lib. vi, 5. P.L. 144, 381.

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templative life has been described in the following words: 'The mystics' claim has been expressed by the Christian mystics as "the experimental perception of God's presence and being" and especially "union with God"—a union, that is to say, not merely psychological, in conforming the will to God's will, but, it may be said, ontological, of the soul with God, spirit with spirit. And they declare that the experience is a momentary foretaste of the bliss of Heaven.'¹

Certainly Damian believed that the holy man can see his Creator while still in the body of this death, and that he can be mystically united to Him in spiritual wedlock. He says so quite clearly in a letter to Desiderius: 'Holy men are able to look even now upon their Creator by the grace of contemplation.' He goes on to say that this glimpse of God is necessarily incomplete, but this does not make the statement any the less striking in itself. Again, writing to his beloved Empress Agnes, he speaks of the mystical marriage of contemplation, and prays that its grace may be vouchsafed to her: 'May Christ hold converse with you; may he be your comrade and your guest . . . may he clasp you in his virginal embrace, so that in you also the words of Isaiah may be fulfilled: "As the bridegroom rejoiceth over the bride, so shall thy God rejoice over thee." Secure in his embraces may you sweetly rest, so that He may offer as if to Himself a haven of inward peace Who vouchsafed to suffer shipwreck for you amid the rising storms of this world.'

Like his predecessors, Damian makes use of many analogies in an endeavour to describe the contemplative state; like them too, he has recourse above all to two images. The first and most frequent is that of light. That which the mystic beholds in contemplation he calls, in various places, 'the light of eternity', 'the light of contemplation', 'the heavenly light', 'the splendour of inward contemplation'. He is illumined 'by the shining rays of the Divine light'. This is the language of the early western contemplatives; he makes no mention of rays of Divine darkness or dark nights of the soul, but is true to

¹ Cuthbert Butler, *Western Mysticism*, prologue.

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the tradition of what has been called Benedictine asceticism.

His second analogy has an equally long and distinguished history. By it, the contemplative state is described as a spiritual marriage. Two examples will suffice as illustration. The first is again addressed to the Empress Agnes: 'It remains for you to come to the innermost sweetness of your husband (Christ), to that delightful union of conjoined spirits';¹ the other comes from a letter to a fellow-bishop: 'When any holy soul is truly joined to its Redeemer by love, then it is united with Him as if on the bridal couch in a bond of intimate delight.'²

His words leave no doubt that for him the vision of God is the aim of the ascetic life. But he does not claim that this vision is enjoyed by the contemplative still imprisoned in the bonds of the flesh in exactly the same manner as it is by the blessed in Heaven. Something is inevitably lacking; a *magnum aliquid*, as he described it to Desiderius, to which man's spirit cannot aspire while it remains within the corruptible body. In an admirable and striking passage he compares the soul to a flying-fish; with the aid of the wings of virtue it leaps from the confining waters into the heavenly air of contemplation, yet must of its nature always fall back into the sea of everyday human life.

It must be stressed that Damian did not regard contemplation as the prerogative of the intellectual. It was not an esoteric science, though it demanded discipline and method, but a way of life as accessible to the simple and unlettered as to the scholar: 'There are some simple brethren who do not know the meaning of contemplation, and therefore cannot exert themselves in spiritual studies; but when they make themselves utterly dead to the world, and strive to wear themselves out in labours for obedience' sake, and long in all things to obey their superiors they obtain a place very near to God.'³ Indeed, mere worldly learning could be a hindrance rather than a help to contemplation; certainly it was not essential. 'Who

¹ *Opusc.* 56, 6. P.L. 145, 815.

² *Epistolae* lib. iv, 16. P.L. 144, 333.

³ *Epistolae* lib. ii, 12. P.L. 144, 280.

lights a lantern that he may see the sun, or candles that he may behold the glory of the stars?"² asks Damian.

Contemplation, then, is the *visio Dei* here on earth; it is the beholding of the face of truth, albeit imperfectly; it is attainable by all who desire it and strive for it; its root is love of God, its stem the mortification of flesh and spirit, its fruit the sweetness of the mystic union, its flower an all-embracing charity. But although he maintains that it can be granted to anyone, Damian never fails to remind us that it is a *charisma*, a grace freely given, bestowed or withheld by God as He sees fit. He speaks always of 'the grace of contemplation', of 'the things which it was given to me to behold'. Here is no Pelagian reliance on the will and power of man; the ascetic must strive, but he must also pray. Contemplation is a gift, not a virtue.

The preparations which the would-be contemplative must make, the spiritual journey to that point from which he may see, by God's grace, those things which eye has not seen, nor ear heard and which the heart of man cannot conceive, are described by Damian in the form of an analogy dear to all mystical writers from St. Augustine onwards; that of the two wives of Jacob, Leah and Rachel. He divides his comparison into three sections. The first, represented by the first of Jacob's periods of bondage to Laban, is the first rung of the contemplative ladder, the destruction of vice by means of obedience to the commandments of the Old Law; this is what ascetical theologians describe as the purgative stage. He who passes through it successfully hopes to come at once to the delights of contemplation; but this cannot be. Instead of the lovely Rachel, he must marry her elder sister 'for in the darkness of human ignorance we are enjoined to be patient in labour'. The second stage, represented by the second period of Jacob's servitude, consists in the implanting of virtues; the monk passes from a slavish obedience to the precepts of the Decalogue to a free adherence to the counsels of the New Testament; for perseverance in good works must be established before the repose of contemplation can be granted. At

² *Opusc.* 45, 8. P.L. 145, 701-2.

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last, after years of toil and weariness, Jacob wins Rachel; the seeker after God is given the grace of contemplation. But he cannot rest there in peace. Rachel is beautiful but barren; and like Jacob the monk must continue to be fruitful in good works. Damian makes this point even clearer when he compares the contemplative to Moses going in and out of the Temple of the Covenant: 'He goes in and out of the temple to show us that he who is inwardly rapt in contemplation is often outwardly troubled by the affairs of the needy; within he contemplates the hidden things of God, but outwardly he bears the burdens of carnal things.'¹

But how far were his teachings based upon personal experience? To those who have some knowledge of his writings there can be no doubt that Peter Damian was a true contemplative. As Dom Leclercq says: 'The fervour and beauty and freshness of his language are certain indications of personal experience.'² It was the vision of God that he sought and found in the rocky solitude of Fonte Avellana. 'I longed to cleave with all my heart to the everlasting light. My heart then, as it seemed, was made of wax, as that of the Lord's prophet was of flesh; and it melted in flame under the breath of heavenly desire, and my sorrowing countenance was often watered by rich tears. . . . I often beheld, by an immediate perception of my mind, Christ hanging from the cross, fastened with nails, and thirstily received His dripping blood in my mouth. But if I were to attempt to tell you of the heights of contemplation which were vouchsafed to me, both of our Redeemer's most sacred humanity and of the indescribable glory of Heaven, the day would be at an end before I had finished.'³

It was because the burdens and racketings of life outside the monastery, even of ecclesiastical life, shattered the spiritual quiet so necessary to the pursuit of contemplation that Damian partook with reluctance in the ecclesiastical politics of his day. He was forced to accept the cardinalate thrust upon him by

¹ *Epistolae* lib. ii, 12. P.L. 144, 282.

² J. Leclercq, 'Contemplation' in *Dictionnaire de Spiritualité*, t.II.

³ *Opusc.* 19. P.L. 145, 432.

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Stephen IX, but he spent the ten years after the latter's death in trying to rid himself of his episcopal burden. He went on papal legations when the good of the Church demanded it; he attended many of the important synods held by Leo IX, Nicholas II and Alexander II, but he paid the price in the loss of that tranquillity which he so greatly prized as a means to contemplation, and did not hesitate to point this out to those who charged him with the affairs of the Church. It was perhaps for this reason that the glimpses which Damian gives us of those moments of grace when he was rapt in contemplation are rare. But he has a great deal to say about the long and arduous preparation for the mystical life, chiefly in the letters and sermons addressed to his monks, and his ascetical teaching was a vital factor in the life of his own and later generations.

2. DAMIAN'S ASCETICAL TEACHING

The ascetic life is frequently described as an ascent towards contemplation; if we conceive of it as a ladder, we may say that it has three rungs: the mortification of the flesh, the discipline of the spirit, and the way of prayer. But such distinctions are, in a sense, both arbitrary and artificial, since these stages are not successive; they must, indeed, be simultaneous. Neither is the ascent of the ascetical ladder in itself a guarantee that the contemplative state will be reached; it merely brings the aspirant to that point of departure from which God will, if He so desires, raise him to the heights of mystic union. However, the analogy enables us to distinguish what cannot be divided: the different aspects of the ascetic life. Damian deals extensively both with mortification, by which he means the discipline of the will as well as of the body, and with prayer. These are sometimes called the negative and positive aspects of asceticism, but the description is not altogether satisfactory, for it may be doubted whether mortification as taught and practised by the great contemplatives was a purely negative thing.

The subjection of the flesh and the discipline of the will are

fundamental to Damian's conception of the monastic life; they are essential because, by destroying earthly desires, they enable the monk to concentrate all his affections upon God. He sums up the virtues of the religious life as 'fervent love of God and mortification of self' and proceeds to show that the two are interdependent: 'If those words of the Apostle "always bearing about in our bodies the dying of the Lord Jesus" really lived in us, all our delight would of necessity be in God, since fleshly love would have nowhere to spread within us; our leaping fire would burn there with Him, since it would find no room within ourselves.'¹

The prudent man, he who is intent on his salvation, will gird his loins with the girdle of perfect mortification; 'he achieves this when the greedy gullet is kept in check; when the wanton tongue is compelled to be silent; when the ears are shut to scandalmongering; when the eyes are forbidden to look upon unlawful things; when the hand is bound, for fear it should strike another cruelly, and the foot, lest it should wander idly; when the heart is withstood, for fear it should envy the prosperity of another, or desire and covet that which is not its own, lest it should be cut off from brotherly love by anger, or raise itself above others in its pride, or succumb to the delights of enticing pleasure; lest it should be too much weighed down by grief or lay itself open to the seductions of joy. Since, then, the human mind cannot be utterly empty, but must always be concerned with love of something, it must be completely surrounded by this wall of virtue; that which is not permitted to expand in its own surroundings must necessarily be carried above itself.'

From this passage two concepts emerge which are of the utmost importance if Damian's ascetical doctrine is to be fully understood. The first is the stress laid on love of one's fellows as an essential part of spiritual discipline. This is a concept common to all great writers; but it is emphasized here because too many have seen in Peter Damian only a barren and inward-turning asceticism. It is true that he repeats the invectives of

¹ *Opusc.* 13, 2. P.L. 145, 294.

the early ascetic Fathers against the passions of greed and lust; 'sit in thy cell and restrain thy tongue and thy belly' is his maxim, as it was theirs, but he does not consider it to be sufficient in itself. We shall see later that he held that the body should be severely disciplined; his defence of flagellations, fastings and vigils is worthy of the master 'athletes' of the Thebaid. It is therefore the more remarkable that here, when discussing the essentials of the ascetic discipline, he should be so much more concerned with the practice of virtue than with any merely corporal penance. The monk must not be arrogant or angry or jealous, not merely because by restraining evil passions he mortifies his will, but for fear he should be cut off from the love of the brotherhood. This emphasis on charity ennobles the whole concept of mortification.

Secondly, this passage is a vivid demonstration of Damian's belief that mortification is only valid if pursued as a means to contemplation. The human spirit must love, for loving is its natural activity; therefore its loving must be confined within a wall of virtue, so that it may rise only to God. There is nothing Manichaean in this frugality, this renunciation, this castigation of the flesh; 'God forbid that we should condemn anything which God has made', says Damian. It is a question of surrendering a lesser good that we may come to possess a greater.

Besides this basic reason for the practice of mortification, there are two others: the imitative and the penitential motives. Suffering is good because Christ suffered; what He endured for us we too should be prepared to undergo for His sake. In his sermon for the Feast of the Nativity of the Virgin, Damian writes: 'Christ gave Himself to death for our sakes; let us too mortify in ourselves all the pleasure of earthly desire for love of Him. By undergoing death on the gibbet of the Cross He prepared a way for us by which we could return to our native land, that having been lured away by pleasure, we might return embittered by weeping; that we who fell away through our delight in unlawful things might rise again in abstaining even from lawful things; that we who were cast down because of the

arrogance of our pride might be raised up by the lowliness of a humble life.¹ Perfectly to imitate Christ, it is necessary to share His pain; but life does not provide us with such pains as these, and so we must inflict them on ourselves: this is the ascetic premiss.

But we suffer not only in imitation of Christ, the Sinless, but also because we deserve to suffer for our sins. To mortify the flesh is to make some small satisfaction for the sins of the flesh. When Peter Cerebrosus attacked Damian for exhorting the faithful to flagellate themselves, Damian replied: 'I scourge both flesh and spirit because I know that I have offended in both flesh and spirit.'² He believes that it is not enough to have renounced sin; past sins must be atoned for.

Mortification, then, is firstly a means to contemplation, secondly a true imitation of Christ, and thirdly an endeavour to make amends for past misdeeds. It consists as much in the cultivation of virtue as in the uprooting of vice. The particular means which Damian adopted to achieve these ends are most clearly seen in the advice which he gave to his own congregation of Fonte Avellana and in the rule of life which they followed.

Physical discipline is for Damian an essential characteristic of the religious life; 'as it is the duty of priests to offer sacrifice and of doctors to preach, so the task of the hermit is to rest in fasting and silence.'³ Fasting is the surest way of controlling the wayward passions of the flesh: 'The belly must be held in restraint lest, when it is filled with excess of food, it should infect the other members with vice.' Nevertheless there is need for moderation in penitential practices if the monk is to reap the full fruits of mortification. Damian stresses the need for 'modus et discretio', for if too heavy a burden is laid upon the weak it will drag them down. So Damian's rules for fasting, laid down in his treatise on the institutes of his congregation, while they seem to us almost too severe, are not representative

¹ *Sermo* 45. P.L. 144, 299.

² *Epistolae* lib. vi, 27. P.L. 144, 417.

³ *Opusc.* 15, 5. P.L. 145, 339.

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of the way of life of the more austere members; they constitute a minimum. He lays down these rules clearly and meticulously, first defining what he means by a fast. 'We say that those men fast who take only bread, water and salt; if anything else is added, then it is not a perfect fast.'

The monks fasted throughout the year as follows: from the octave of Easter to Pentecost a strict fast was observed on four days of the week; on Tuesdays, Thursdays and Sundays two meals were taken. From the octave of Pentecost to the feast of St. John the Baptist there were five days of fasting; two meals were still eaten on Sunday and Thursday, but on Tuesday only one, which was delayed until three o'clock in the afternoon. For the period from the feast of St. John to September 13th the rules were the same as for the period from Easter to Pentecost. During the great monastic Lent, from September to Easter, the monks fasted strictly on five days of the week; on Thursdays they took two meals and on Sundays only one. The only exceptions to these rules were certain great feasts and the three octaves of Christmas, Easter and Pentecost. Damian's severity, however, was tempered with sympathy for human weakness; when laying down the Lenten regulations he adds a rider: 'Saving always this: that merciful indulgence be shown to the weaker brethren, as may seem necessary.'

The diet of the Avellanese hermits was meagre; they took no meat, and wine was allowed only for use at the altar, or for the sick, or for those who, having newly come from the world, found complete abstention too great a burden. For a time, indeed, there is evidence that Damian entirely forbade the use of wine except for the Holy Sacrifice, but he was obliged to restore the privilege, since many of the brethren fell sick, and some who wished to enter the congregation were deterred by the appalling severity of this ruling. Bread and vegetables formed their staple diet; cheese, fish and eggs were permitted, but many of the brethren did not take advantage of this. This stringent abstinence from more food than was essential for the preserving of life and health was not regarded as a withholding from what was evil. 'By this abstinence we destroy the desires

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of our gullets and extinguish the flames of lust; we do not condemn anything which God has made, and God forbid that we should.¹

Damian regarded fasting as the foundation of physical mortification. He also attached great importance to other forms of self-inflicted corporal penance, and in particular to the use of the discipline. Flagellation is the most controversial of ascetic practices, and in Damian's own day it met with much opposition, both from monks like Peter Cerebrosus and from eminent churchmen like Pope Stephen IX, the former abbot of Monte Cassino. It is not our task to assess the relative merits of the arguments for and against this practice, but to consider Damian's justification of it. His case for the defence is presented in a short tract addressed to the monks of Monte Cassino, entitled *De Laude Flagellorum*. Stephen IX had discouraged the monks of this house from continuing the practice of public flagellation in chapter. Peter attacked the abandonment of the custom with all the passion and power at his command: 'Tell me, you who in your arrogance mock at Christ's passion, you who, in refusing to be stripped and scourged with Him, deride His nakedness and all His torments as foolish and vain things like the illusions which come to us in sleep, what will you do when you see Him who was stripped in public and hung on the Cross shining in the glory of His majesty, surrounded by the angelic host, with His immeasurable and incomparable splendour round about Him, more glorious than all things, visible or invisible? What, I say, will you do, when you behold Him for whose shame you now have nothing but scorn, seated on the fiery throne of the tribunal of Heaven, and judging the whole human race in the dreadful judgment of His justice? By what rash boldness of presumption do you hope to share in His glory, whose shame and injuries you scorned to bear?'² He reminds his readers that the apostles did not scorn to be scourged, describing the discipline as *apostolica verbera*. Since to be scourged is to imitate Christ, and since there is now little

¹ *Opusc.* 32, prol. P.L. 145, 544.

² *Opusc.* 43, 4. P.L. 145, 682-3.

likelihood of our receiving such treatment at the hands of others, the true follower of Christ must inflict these chastisements on himself.

As a result of Damian's preaching, the practice of flagellation spread far and wide, as he himself states in the introduction to *De Laude Flagellorum*. Not only monks but the layfolk of town and countryside took up the practice. In his own congregation flagellation was sometimes carried to lengths that even he could not wholeheartedly approve. He tells us of Dominicus Loricatus, Prior of Suavicino, who would recite the whole Psalter eight times without ceasing, lashing himself throughout. By the end of his life his whole body was so disfigured by this treatment that he was scarcely recognizable. Such excesses could do nothing but harm to the reputation of the congregation, and Damian wrote to the hermits of Gamugnum warning them against exceeding the limits of good sense: 'You are well aware, dearly beloved, that the discipline of flagellation which you practise so fervently can be harmful if used without discretion, just as it is profitable in moderation. Because of this the strength of your weary bodies fails, and sometimes, as some believe, worn out by so many blows they fall ill, especially since some of you will recite the whole Psalter once or even twice, scourging yourselves throughout. And so it happens that some brethren who wish to enter the hermitage, hearing such tales, are deterred by fear from so doing. Wherefore, showing a measure of discretion, we have decreed that no one in the hermitage shall be compelled to use the discipline; and if holy zeal urges anyone to this, he is permitted to scourge himself for the course of forty psalms, and no more, in any one day. By doing this we are not depriving you of any good, but pruning away what is unnecessary.'¹

Damian also recommended other practices which were common in his own congregation, such as the custom of praying with the arms outstretched in the form of a cross, and of making continuous genuflections while reciting the Psalter in private; these, however, were not compulsory, being left to the

¹ *Epistolae* lib. vi, 34. P.L. 144, 433.

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discretion of the individual monk: 'We impose no law on the brethren in these matters . . . for there are some to whom not all are profitable, and so it seems safer and better that they should be given freedom of choice.' Here once more are revealed the consideration, humanity and moderation of this great ascetic; it is an important and neglected facet of his character.

These then are the instruments of mortification: fasting, flagellation and private penance. Their end is to bring the body into subjection and to extinguish unlawful passions. The second stage in the ascetic's progress, which consists in solitude, silence and stability, is directed to a different end: still discipline, it is true, but a discipline of the will and of the spirit, which will cause virtue to flourish in the soul and enable the monk to draw nearer to God.

Of these, the most important, perhaps, to Damian is solitude. The beautiful words of John of Fécamp concerning the solitary life would have found an echo in his heart: 'How fair you are, O hermitage, and how good, strewn with flowers, filled with lilies, rich in the precious stones which are set in the city of the Eternal King. You are a place of refreshment for Christ's poor, the dwelling-place of the lovers of God, healing shade to those who flee from the heat of this world, a place of green pasture, where the wild ass who despises cities lies and the deer of the mountain-peaks feed. Indeed, my heart loves you and my soul greatly desires your beauty.'¹ These words are a clear illustration of that passion for the solitary life which filled the minds of so many holy men in the eleventh century, and was the driving force of the eremitic movement which swept over northern Italy. This movement had for its founders St. Romuald and St. Nilus of Rossano; in Peter Damian it found its champion.

For Damian stood in something of the same relation to the eremitic movement of his day as did St. Bernard to the early Cistercians; he gave it prestige and direction; he attracted many

¹ John of Fécamp, *Deploratio quietis et solitudinis derelictae*. Ed. J. P. Bonnes and J. Leclercq, in *Jean de Fécamp. Un maître de la vie spirituelle au XI^e siècle* Paris, 1946.

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disciples to its ranks; and his personal holiness drew attention to the way of life in which his spirituality was rooted. It is because he diverged from the main stream of western spirituality, turning away from the Benedictine tradition as it had developed, and seeking the sources of his ideal in the desert, that he was one of the most important figures in the sphere of contemporary monasticism. It has rightly been said that it is above all in his quality as a monk, and because of the eremitic ideal which he never ceased to proclaim, that he was one of the initiators of the Gregorian reform.¹

Damian argued, with considerable force, that St. Benedict himself believed the eremitic life to be the most perfect, and had written his rule for cenobites as a sort of training manual for beginners. The saint, he maintained, not only did not forbid monks to leave their communities for the rigours of the desert; he actually urged them to do so. Whether or not this is a true interpretation of St. Benedict's thought, it was certainly a break with the Benedictine tradition as it had grown up in the West throughout the centuries. Damian admitted that it might be a good and pleasant thing for brothers to dwell together in unity; but it was a higher and holier thing to live in solitude, to shun the delights and distractions of life in society. The *Regula Monachorum* he compared to a great house which shelters many, young and old, rich and poor, strong and weak; but the monk must never forget the existence of a more perfect way of life, the higher and broader pastures of Cassian and the Desert Fathers.

His position in this matter is sharply defined in a passage from his treatise on the customs of his congregation: 'There are many ways which lead to God; there are divers orders in the community of the faithful; but of all these no way is so straight, so sure, so swift, so free of obstacles as this (i.e. the eremitic) for it removes almost all the occasions of sin and directs us to an increase of those virtues which please God; so that it destroys the power of sinning and imposes by force of

¹ J. Leclercq, 'Une lettre inédite de S. Pierre Damien' in *Studia Anselmiana*, fasc. 18-19, 1947.

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necessity perseverance in good works.”¹ Uncompromisingly, unambiguously he states his premiss; the solitary life is most perfect, not because it is the hardest but because it is the surest way to God. The lax state of many of the monasteries of his day can only have confirmed him in his opinions; some were so degenerate that he even says that it is better to receive laymen straight from the world into the hermitage than to send them first to a monastery for a period of training, since those who come from monasteries are often more degraded than those who come from the world. This was doubtless an extreme view, induced by disgust at the debauched living of a few individuals; nevertheless, not even the knowledge of the cenobitic life at its best, as lived at Cluny under the direction of the saintly Abbot Hugh, could alter his belief that true perfection is the prerogative of the solitary. The monastic life, however well lived, is not to be preferred to the eremitic: ‘for indeed that is good, but this is better. And to descend from what is better to what is good is to fall from the heights to the depths, to turn one’s back on the right path, to sink from spiritual zeal into a harmful lukewarmness, and thus to fall, bit by bit, from the peaks into the abyss.’²

To Damian, the life lived in community is a training-ground; here the novice takes his first steps along the road to perfection; here he studies the rudiments of the science of contemplation; here he learns to handle the weapons which he will later use in single combat with the demons. ‘To him who is aiming at the heights of perfection the monastery is a stage, not a dwelling-place, a hostel and not a home, not the end of his striving but a resting-place on the way. . . . Here he submits himself for a time to the discipline of regular obedience; his life in the monastery is only a preparation for the desert.’³ This is no Basilian concept of the value of the community life as such; while the communal life is good, the solitary life is better. Not that the hermit disdains the bonds of charity; but for him

¹ *Opusc.* 15, 1. P.L. 145, 537.

² *Opusc.* 14. P.L. 145, 334.

³ *Epistolae* lib. vi, 12. P.L. 144, 393.

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they consist more in prayer for the brethren whom he cannot see, in the prayer which unites him to the body of the Church, than in the active service of his neighbour or the common life.

For again and again we return to the well-spring of Damian's teaching: the aim of the religious life is contemplation of the Godhead. And since this cannot be achieved without freedom from the cares and distractions of the world it is best that the would-be contemplative should cut himself off from the society of his fellows. Damian is not unaware of the dangers inherent in such a way of life; he warns his disciples about the perils threatening the unchecked will: 'Above all, he must beware of this: that he does not cast off the yoke of obedience under the pretence of living the eremitic life; rather he must be the more closely bound by the law of obedience since he knows that his way of life excels the rule of the cenobites. . . . In order that our withdrawal and suffering may be fruitful, they must be seasoned with the health-giving salt of obedience; whatever branches of good work our lives may send forth, obedience must always lie at the root.' He exhorts his hermits to fraternal charity; they must always welcome their brethren with joy. But the incidental stumbling-blocks which the hermit may encounter are as nothing to the dangers he leaves behind him in the world; and in the hermitage he finds a school of heavenly doctrine, a paradise of delight, a garden of all the virtues.

Here then we have the coping-stone of the structure of Damian's ascetical thought: the eremitic ideal. This was the mould in which he cast the common substance of the Christian traditions of the West, and from which he produced his distinctive contribution to eleventh-century spirituality. He was neither the first nor the last to sing the praises of solitude; he was not even the originator of the contemporary movement; but he was its mouthpiece and its figurehead.

The solitary life, however, was in itself no guarantee of spiritual perfection, and Damian does not fail to stress other aspects of spiritual discipline: silence and stability. Silence is enjoined, not so much as an act of penance, as because idle conversation distracts the soul and prevents it from concen-

trating upon the things of the spirit. 'We hold our tongues in check because if they are undisciplined they empty the soul of the strength of heavenly grace, and weaken its healthful vigour.'¹ Unnecessary conversation is a prime cause of spiritual ruin, for the weaker brethren, under the pretence of a need for spiritual advice, will visit one another's cells and soon pass from spiritual matters to vain and idle chatter, whence it is but a step to worldliness, slander and detraction. A merely physical silence is not, however, sufficient; interior tranquillity is necessary if the ascetic is to attain to the vision of God. This inner silence is the fruit of a well-led life; he who pursues the way of true mortification, who takes up the cross of Christ, will no longer enjoy frivolous gossip; instead, he will rejoice in psalms, hymns and spiritual songs, and will seek a hiding-place far removed from his fellows; he will shun the cloisters of the monastery as he would the public market, and, that he may the more easily stand in the presence of his Creator, will avoid all human contact, as far as that is possible. The watchword of the contemplative is 'Be still, and know that I am God.'

Stability is as important as silence. *Sede in cella tua*; instability is a disease, the *morbus vagationis*, or *inquietudo*, as he calls it. Its unhappy victims lose the fruits both of the active and of the contemplative lives; they endeavour to disguise their faults under the cloak of obedience, and their wanderings in the world make it harder than ever for them to reap the advantages of the monastic life. 'To the wanderer his cell is a prison; but to those who remain there steadfastly it is a sweet resting-place; to the monk who perseveres silence brings wakefulness, but to him who returns from outside it causes sleepiness; abstinence strengthens the body of the man accustomed to fasting, but rich food weakens it.'² The man who remains perpetually in his cell makes of his whole body a tongue to sing the praises of stability. Of all the *gyrovagi* a wandering hermit is the most displeasing to Damian; stability is especially necessary for the solitary. He even deplures restless pacing up and down within

¹ *Opusc.* 15, 5.

² *Opusc.* 12, 25. P.L. 145, 278.

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the cell, since such a habit is a symptom of inner instability. He himself was prevented by the calls made upon him from fulfilling his own precepts concerning this important aspect of monastic discipline, but one has only to read the moving accounts of the joy which filled him when he returned to Fonte Avellana after weary journeys on papal business to realize that he truly desired that stability which he recommended to others: 'Just as an invalid who goes into a room full of spices and herbs sets aside the weariness of his complaint and begins to feel better even before he has taken any medicine, so I, as soon as I cross the threshold of my cell, before I have opened a single book, feel well and safe, thank God, by the virtue of that place, and the wounds of my spirit are healed.'¹

The third stage in the ascent of the soul towards God is that of prayer. For Peter Damian prayer was not only the royal road to contemplation; it was the prime duty of every Christian. In a short treatise on the canonical hours he remarks: 'Dearly beloved, do not regard this labour of Christian service as an offering; it is a duty. It is a matter of necessity, not of free choice. As you profess yourself a Christian, as you sign yourself with the sign of the Cross, as you never let a day go by without invoking the Lord's name, so do not presume to omit this for any reason whatever.'² He stresses the importance of both public and private prayer, and agrees with St. Benedict that nothing is to be preferred to the *Opus Dei*. For the trumpet-call of the Gospel summons us to continual prayer, and while the whole life of a just man is a prayer, those who are weak can be sure that they have fulfilled the evangelical command if they recite the Divine Office daily.

Public prayer was an essential element in the life of the Avellanese congregation; part of this quasi-eremitic community sang the office in choir just as its cenobitic brethren did. Damian compares the procession of monks going to the church in order to perform the *Opus Dei* to the army of Christ; 'We go forth as an army to the battle when we hasten to the church

¹ *Epistolae* lib. vi, 5. P.L. 144, 379.

² *Opusc.* 10, 7. P.L. 145, 229.

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to recite the Psalter or to pray. For there the princes of darkness wage fierce war against us, trying to distract our wandering minds from the words we are saying by illusions of the imagination. And what a splendid host it is, especially at night, when the brethren form their ranks as if aroused by the sound of the trumpet, and hastening like an ordered army march together to the arena of the divine battle.¹

Damian also reminded his brethren of the perennial truth that he who prays in solitude does not pray alone; the whole Church of Christ prays with and in him. "The Church of Christ is united in all its parts by such a bond of love that her several members form a single body, and in each one the whole Church is mystically present. . . . If, therefore, those who believe in Christ are one, then wherever we find a member according to outward appearances, there, by the mystery of the sacrament, the whole body is present."²

Concerning private prayer as such Damian has little that is specific to say. There can, however, be no doubt that he attached great importance to its place in the *vita contemplativa*; certainly he stressed the importance of purity of heart and tears of compunction when praying. A donkey, he says, produces only an ugly braying when alive; after it is dead, however, parts of its body are used to make instruments which produce sweet music; likewise, a man must be dead to sin before he can pray well.

While his teaching on prayer in general is implicit rather than explicit, his doctrine concerning tears of compunction has been described as richer than that of any western writer who precedes him. 'Pray to God with tears daily' is his counsel to those seeking perfection. And he develops this advice: "The moisture of tears cleanses the soul from all stain and makes fertile the fields of the heart so that they may bring forth the seeds of virtue. . . . The tears which come from God approach the judgment seat of the divine mercy with perfect confidence, and obtaining at once what they ask, are assured of the certain

¹ *Opusc.* 13, 17. P.L. 145, 316.

² *Opusc.* 11, 5-6. P.L. 145, 235-6.

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forgiveness of our sins. Tears are the trustees in the making of peace between God and man, and true and wise masters amid the doubtings of human ignorance. For if we are wondering whether or not we are pleasing to God, no better guarantee can be given us than that we pray with genuine tears.¹ He praises tears, too, as a means to contemplation: 'O tears of spiritual joy, better than honey or the honeycomb, and sweeter than any nectar! you who renew minds lifted up to God with the pleasant sweetness of an inward savour, and water dry and wasting hearts at their very core with the stream of heavenly grace! For the sweetness and savour of earthly banquets delight the palates of those who eat them, yet do not penetrate to their inmost parts; but the savour of divine contemplation wholly fills us inwardly, and there quickens and sweetens us.'² It was axiomatic with all the great contemplatives that they that sow in tears shall reap in joy; Damian follows the purest tradition.

Damian's doctrine of prayer, then, is one with that of Benedict and Cassian; he regarded it as a chief means to contemplation. Dom Berlière has admirably summed up the attitude of the early western contemplatives to prayer: 'When the ancient writers speak of prayer, they are careful to distinguish it from meditation which they consider to be the normal preparation for prayer; in the same way, they unite it with contemplation, which is for them the normal and usual end of prayer.'³

3. THE SOURCES OF DAMIAN'S ASCETICAL THOUGHT

In the writings of Peter Damian and in the spirituality which they reveal we can trace three sources of influence. The first, as we might expect, is that of St. Paul and of the western fathers, Augustine, Jerome and Gregory. The second is that of the monastic writers, Benedict, Basil and Cassian. The third is that of St. Romuald. There may possibly be a fourth: the influence of contemporary Byzantine spirituality. There is no

¹ *Opusc.* 13, 12. P.L. 145, 308.

² *Ibid.*, 309.

³ U. Berlière, *L'Ascèse Benoîtine*, c. 7.

written evidence to support such a conjecture; nevertheless the facts suggest at least a consensus of possibilities. There are parallels between the general organization of an Avellanese or Camaldolese house, with its monastery and hermitage set side by side and mutually dependent, and contemporary Greek monachism as described by Nicetas Stethatos in his *Life of Symeon the New Theologian*. There is the fact that Damian, who made frequent visits to Rome and had close contacts with Monte Cassino, cannot have been ignorant of the work of Nilus of Rossano. Again, the ties between Italy and Constantinople, though frequently irritating to both parties, were still strong in Damian's lifetime.

An early library catalogue of Fonte Avellana gives us some idea of the writings of the Fathers and of others which were available to Damian. It lists, among others, the following works:

1. Gregory the Great: *The Moralia*, the *Commentary on Ezechiel*, the *Commentary on the Book of Kings*, the *Dialogues*, the *Homilies* and the *Pastoral Care*.

2. St. Augustine: *Super Genesim ad litteram*, *Liber Questionum et Locutionum Veteris Testamenti*, *De Bono Conjugio*, the *Dialogue of the Soul*, *On Christian Doctrine*, *On the Trinity*, the *Confessions*, *On the Psalms*, *On Faith and Works*, the *City of God*, *On the Joannine Epistles*, *The Work of Monks*, *Against Faustus*, *Letters*, etc.

3. St. Ambrose: *Hexameron*, *On the Three Patriarchs*, *Of Faith and Grace*, *On the Epistle to the Romans*, *On the Epistle to the Corinthians*, *On St. Luke's Gospel*, *Of the Sacraments*, the *Beati Immaculati*, the *Letters* and *De Officiis*.

4. St. Jerome: *Letters*, *On Famous Men*, *On the Ten Prophets*, the *Lives of the Fathers*, *De quaestionibus hebraicis*, *On the Psalms*, *On Ezechiel*, *Treatise on Isaiah*, *On St. Mark's Gospel*.

5. Origen: *On Genesis*, *On Leviticus*, *Treatise on the Psalms*, *Commentary on St. Matthew's Gospel*.

Other works included in the catalogue are the *Collations* of Cassian, the *Book of Sentences*, Burchard's *Liber Canonum*, Hilary on the Psalms, Amalarius's *De Officiis*, Bede's com-

mentary on the canonical epistles, a book containing the rules of SS. Augustine, Basil, Jerome and Pachomius, a volume of sermons by Gregory Nazianzen, the letters of St. Cyril, Smaragdus's *Diadema Monachorum*, and the *Rule of St. Benedict*. There are also several historical works (Jordanus, Eusebius, etc.), copies of the Scriptures, Psalters and other manuscripts.

It is likely that the Avellanese library contained many of these manuscripts when Damian was alive, as he himself tells us of the trouble which he went to in order to increase the number of books in the scriptorium. Certainly he quotes from several of them in his work; for example, from the *Moralia*, *Dialogues*, *Homilies* and the *Pastoral Care* of St. Gregory; from the *De Trinitate*, the *City of God*, the *Commentary on the Psalms*, the *Commentary on St. John's Epistles* and the *De Opere Monachorum* of St. Augustine; from St. Ambrose's *Faith and Grace*; from the *Commentary on the Prophets* and the *De quaestionibus hebraicis* of St. Jerome; from the letters of St. Cyril and from Paschasius's treatise *De Corpore Domini*.

But he also cites texts and authors not included in the catalogue—to name but a few, the *Contra Crescentius* of St. Augustine, the *Adversus Jovinianum* of Jerome, the *Register* of Gregory the Great, St. Athanasius's *Contra Arium*, St. Ambrose's *De Obitu Theodosii*, the letters of Leo the Great and the *Institutes* of Justinian. From this we must conclude either that the twelfth-century catalogue was incomplete (which is unlikely) or that Damian had access to libraries other than his own. We know that he was a welcome guest at many of the great monastic houses of his day, and especially at Monte Cassino, and we know from the *Chronicon Cassinense* how the scriptorium of that monastery thrived under the rule of Damian's friend Desiderius. It may have been here, for example, that Damian had access to the *Institutes* of Justinian and the *Register* of Leo the Great, for copies of both these works were made at Monte Cassino during Desiderius's abbacy.

It is now possible to consider in closer detail the sources of Damian's ascetical theology. Naturally, he quotes extensively from the Scriptures in his writings (too extensively, in fact);

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and chiefly from the Old Testament, which provided a mine of material for the analogy and exposition in which he rejoiced, and the Pauline epistles. But these are the common inheritance of Christendom, the foundation upon which the whole structure of Christian thought is built. Who are the authors whose writings and teachings gave to his thought its special cast?

In endeavouring to answer this question one is hampered by the fact that Damian quotes remarkably rarely (or rather, that his quotations are often indirect and unacknowledged). He cites only occasionally the *ipsissima verba* of the Fathers. Nevertheless, a mere cursory glance through his writings throws some light on the problem of his sources. Of the identified quotations, the majority come from the writings of Augustine, Gregory and Jerome, and the honours are fairly equally divided between them. That is what one might expect from an eleventh-century author; while it does not altogether explain Damian's preoccupation with the solitary life and the spirituality of the desert, it is certain that in the western Fathers, and particularly in the traditions of St. Augustine and St. Gregory, Damian found the root of his ascetical thought. His theory of the contemplative life is derived directly from these two great men; when Peter Damian speaks of the active and contemplative lives under the figures of Martha and Mary, or of Leah and Rachel, when he speaks of contemplating the Highest Truth, of the soul illumined by the rays of divine light, he is expressing ideas and beliefs in which Augustine and Gregory would have concurred, in words which would not have been out of place on their lips. At heart, Damian is a traditionalist.

Why, then, did this orthodox and holy man reject the orthodox and conventional religious life of his day? The answer is twofold. In the first place, many of the monasteries of his day were hopelessly lax, even when they were not altogether corrupt; they had not yet been cleansed and changed by that great tide which swept out from Cluny and transformed the Benedictine ideal. In the second place, the new eremitic

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movement which St. Romuald had done so much to propagate in North Italy fired his imagination. Yet he was not aware of having parted from the mainstream of Benedictine spirituality; he believed that he was simply carrying out to the fullest the implications of the *Regula Monachorum*; and St. Benedict is the only man to whom he gives the title 'beatus pater noster'. It is clear that he considered himself and his hermits as part of the great Benedictine family; and indeed his debt to St. Benedict is great, and much of the life and organization of his congregation adhered closely to the prescriptions of the Rule.

But in its essence—the solitude, the fierce austerity—his ascetic ideal contained much of the violence and severity which had characterized the first beginnings of monasticism in the deserts of Egypt and Syria. It is therefore not surprising that Damian should have found much in the writings of Jerome and Cassian, and in the lives and sayings of the Desert Fathers, to attract him. Here was contrast with the degenerate monachism of his day, as he did not fail to point out. An Antony would stand no chance of election as abbot in an eleventh-century monastery, he says; virtuous and austere living is no longer an acceptable qualification for that office. He beseeches his hermits to imitate their holy father Antony in the rigour of their fasting, the strictness of their silence, the vileness of their clothing. He commends the self-inflicted penances of Macarius. Above all, he exhorts them continually to read the pages of Cassian, where they will find a worthy rule of life. And in the treatise on the perfection of monks he uses St. Benedict's own words to encourage them to follow the traditions of the Desert.

"The farmer will be disappointed if, before he has laboured in the sowing of his seed, he seeks to reap the harvest; for it is certain that he who wishes to gather in the grain must first root out the bushes and briars. And the voice of God truly says to sinful man "Thorns and thistles shall it bring forth to thee"; this earth, if it is to produce a rich harvest, must first endure the hoe and the ploughshare, so that having been cultivated by many afflictions and by the discipline of perfect

mortification it may be made beautiful with an abundance of all the virtues. . . . Joshua figuratively urged the sons of Joseph to this work of husbandry by saying to them, when they were complaining of the slenderness of their portion: "If thou be a great people, then get thee up to the wood country, and cut down for thyself there in the land of the Perizzites and of the giants, if Mount Ephraim be too narrow for thee." Now . . . he who has decided to be content with the Rule of the blessed Benedict alone has confined himself within the narrow territory of Mount Ephraim. But listen, and hear how the new Joshua urges you to the heights, and commands you to make haste towards a wider inheritance: "We have written this rule in order that, by observing it, we may show ourselves to have some degree of goodness of life, and a beginning of holiness." This is Mount Ephraim. But because he considers this portion to be a narrow one, he immediately goes beyond it to higher and broader things: "But for him who would hasten to the perfection of religion there are the teachings of the Holy Fathers . . . the Conferences and the Institutes." ¹

Here then are the two streams which met and mingled in the spirit of Peter Damian: the noble and balanced thought of Augustine and Gregory, and the voices crying in the wilderness—Cassian, Jerome, Palladius. From the content of the two traditions he forged his unique contribution to eleventh-century spirituality. And it was an important contribution, both in itself and in relation to him. It explains at once his ardent support of the cause of the Roman Church and his free criticism of her rulers; his eminence and his utter lack of ambition (one of the most estimable of his many attractive qualities); it makes straight the sometimes apparently tortuous ways of his thought. Above all, it justifies the title given to him by the Church in the office of his feast:

O lumen sanctae ecclesiae
Doctor beate Petre!

¹ *Opusc.* 13, 3. P.L. 145, 295.

THE ELEVENTH TREATISE OF
ST. PETER DAMIAN

The Book of 'The Lord Be With You'

To the lord Leo, who, for love of divine liberty, has become a recluse, from Peter the sinful monk, his servant and son.

You know well, most dear father, that I do not regard you just as a colleague or a friend, but as a father, a teacher, a master, a lord, and one who is dearer to me than any other; it is to your prayers that I look to gain me a hearing from the merciful God, and a place in Heaven. What more shall I say? I have always held you to be my guardian angel, and the advice which you have given me in any doubtful matter which was causing me hesitation and difficulty has been accepted as if it had been proclaimed by a messenger from Heaven. So, whenever a crisis of conscience or thought seizes me, before coming to consult you, I beseech the Lord in His mercy to make you the instrument of His will, that through your lips He may decree the course I must take. Now, following my usual custom, I seek to learn from you the answer to a question which many inquirers have asked of me.

Many of the brethren, followers of the eremitic life, have asked me whether, since they live alone in their cells, it is right for them to say *Dominus vobiscum*, *Jube, domne, benedicere*, and the like; and whether, despite the fact that they are by themselves, they should say the responses, as the custom of the Church demands. Some of them argue the matter within themselves in this way: 'Are we to ask a blessing of the stones and furnishings of our cells, or say to them, "The Lord be with you?"' Others fear that if they depart in any way from the prescribed order of the Church they are guilty of sin, in so far as they are diminish-

ing their duty of divine service. And when they come to me for a solution, my foolish wit is driven to make inquiry. Since, then, these difficulties hem me in, I fly to you along the well-worn path which leads to the spring, not of Ciceronian eloquence, but of Divine wisdom.

CHAPTER ONE

I spurn Plato, the searcher into the hidden things of nature, who set a measure to the movements of the planets, and calculated the courses of the stars; Pythagoras, who divided the round world into its regions with his mathematician's rod, means nothing to me; I renounce the much-thumbed books of Nichomachus, and Euclid too, round-shouldered from pouring over his complex geometrical problems; the rhetoricians with their syllogisms and the cavillings of the sophists are useless in this matter. Let the gymnasts shiver in their nakedness for love of wisdom, and the peripatetics seek truth at the bottom of a well.

For I seek from you the Highest Truth, not that which lies ignobly hidden in a well, but that which rose from the earth, and, made manifest to all the world, reigns in eternal majesty in Heaven. What are the inventions of crazy poets to me? What do I care for the melodramatic adventures of pompous tragedians? Let the comedians put an end to the poisoned stream of scurrilities flowing from their noisy lips, and the satirists cease to burden their audiences with bitter banquets of insidious slander. The Ciceronians shall not sway me with their smooth speech, nor the followers of Demosthenes convince me by skilled argument or captious persuasion. Back to your shades, you whom worldly wisdom has defiled! Those blinded by the sulphurous flames of the teachings of darkness can give me nothing. Let the simplicity of Christ instruct me, and the true humility of the wise loose me from the chains of doubt. For, as St. Paul says: 'When God showed us His wisdom, the world, with all its wisdom, could not find its way to God; and now God would use a foolish thing, our preaching, to save those who will believe in it.'

THE BOOK OF 'THE LORD BE WITH YOU'

Away, then, with the letter which kills; let the life-giving spirit come to our aid. For the wisdom of the flesh brings death, but that of the spirit brings life and peace, since the wisdom of the flesh is the enemy of God; it is not subject to God's law, nor can it be. And since the wisdom of the flesh is unable to bear the yoke of God's law, it cannot look upon it either, for its eyes are clouded with the smoke of pride. Loosen this knot for me, father, and do not suffer the disciple of Christ's lowliness to be deceived by the mouthings of proud philosophers. Teach me that of which the unskilled throng of dialecticians knows nothing; let wise folly tell me that which foolish wisdom cannot understand.

CHAPTER TWO

But perhaps you will ask me first to propound my own solution, and give me your judgment afterwards, as do the masters in the schools, who first ask their pupils' opinion concerning a particular problem in the proposition under discussion, so that by drawing them out they may discover their abilities. At your command I will tell you what I think of this problem, so that by your authority I may be corrected if I am mistaken, or have my opinion confirmed if I am right. It is not irrelevant to try to point out the origins of these liturgical customs before we endeavour, by God's grace, to give an answer to these questions of the brethren. The man who is to read the gospel is so humble that he does not ask to be blessed by the priest but by whomever the priest may appoint, saying: 'Pray, lord, a blessing.' But the priest, to show an equal humility, does not delegate the task of blessing to any of his ministers; he does not even presume to give the blessing; but he asks that God, who is above all things, may bestow a blessing.

CHAPTER THREE

The phrase *Dominus vobiscum* is the priest's greeting to the

people; he prays that the Lord may be with them, in accordance with the words spoken by the Prophet: 'I shall dwell within them', and with those spoken by our Saviour to His disciples and all the faithful: 'Behold, I am with you.' This form of greeting, then, is no mere innovation instituted by human authority; it has the sanction of the ancient authority of the Scriptures. Anyone who examines the holy writings carefully will find many examples of its use, both in the singular and the plural. Did not the angel say to the blessed Mother of God: 'The Lord is with thee'? And to Gideon likewise: 'The Lord is with thee, thou mightiest of men'? In the book of Ruth, too, we read that Boaz greeted his harvesters with the words: 'The Lord be with you.' And in the Book of Chronicles we find that the prophet sent by God hailed Asa King of Juda and his army as they were returning in triumph from battle with these words: 'The Lord be with you, for you were with the Lord.'

When the Church receives the salutary greeting of the priest, she greets him in return, and in doing so prays that, as he has desired that the Lord may be with them, so He may deign to be with him. 'And with thy spirit', she replies, meaning: 'May almighty God be with your soul, so that you may worthily pray to Him for our salvation.' Notice that she says not 'with thee', but 'with thy spirit'; this is to remind us that all things concerned with the services of the Church must be performed in a spiritual manner. And certainly God must prefer to be with a man's spirit, for it is the soul of a reasonable man that is made in God's image and likeness; it alone is capable of receiving divine grace and illumination.

And the greeting which the bishop gives his people: 'Peace be with you' or 'Peace to you', also has its roots in the authority of Holy Writ, and is not just the product of man's mind. For we read in the Old Testament that the angel said to Daniel 'Peace be to you'; and in the New Testament the Lord almost always greets His disciples with the words 'Peace to you.' And He commended the same form of greeting to His disciples, saying: 'Into whatsoever house you shall enter, salute it, saying:

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"Peace to this house." ¹ So it is fitting that the rulers of the Church, who are the successors of the Apostles, should use this form of greeting; for they salute the household of God in which it is right that all men should be the sons of peace, so that the greeting of peace which rests upon them may be advantageous both to the givers of the greeting and to its receivers.

CHAPTER FOUR

Now it is clear from the premisses which I have stated that just as the prophetic writings, the poetry of the psalms and the grace of the gospel have been handed down to us by divine inspiration, so the phrase 'The Lord be with you' comes down to us not through any human choosing, but by the authority of the Old and New Testaments. We do not take away from or add to the authority of the Holy Scriptures because of changing circumstances, because the customs of the Church are preserved in them; so it is wrong for any reason whatever to utter this priestly greeting sometimes and to pass it over in silence at others; for it is unlawful to alter the established custom of the Church even if not more than one person is present.

CHAPTER FIVE

Indeed, the Church of Christ is united in all her parts by such a bond of love that her several members form a single body and in each one the whole Church is mystically present; so that the whole Church universal may rightly be called the one bride of Christ, and on the other hand every single soul can, because of the mystical effect of the sacrament, be regarded as the whole Church. Certainly Isaac with his prophetic nostrils could detect the presence of the whole Church when he said concerning one of his sons: 'See, the smell of my son is as the smell of a field.'² And that widow who was in debt and who at Elisha's command scattered her too small quantity of oil

¹ Matt. x, 12.

² Gen. xxvii, 27.

like seed and soon reaped a rich harvest when it overflowed her vessels was undoubtedly a symbol of the Church.

If we look carefully through the fields of the Holy Scriptures we will find that one man or one woman often represents the Church. For though because of the multitude of her peoples the Church seems to be of many parts, yet she is nevertheless one and simple in the mystical unity of one faith and one divine baptism. And although the seven women had a single husband,¹ a single virgin was said to be espoused to the heavenly bridegroom. Of her the apostle says: 'I have espoused you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ.'²

Now it can be clearly deduced from all this, as I said before, that since the whole Church is represented in the person of one man, and because of this is called a single virgin, holy Church is one in all her members, and complete in each of them; her many members form a single whole in the unity of faith, and her many parts are united in each member by the bond of charity and the various gifts of grace, since all of these proceed from one source.

CHAPTER SIX

For indeed, although holy Church is divided in the multiplicity of her members, yet she is fused into unity by the fire of the Holy Spirit; and so even if she seems, as far as her situation in the world is concerned, to be scattered, yet the mystery of her inward unity can never be marred in its integrity. "The love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us."³ This Spirit is indeed without doubt both one and manifold; one in the essence of His greatness, and manifold in the diverse gifts of His grace, and He gives to holy Church, which He fills, this power: that all her parts shall form a single whole, and that each part shall contain the whole. This mystery of undivided unity was asked for by Truth Himself when He said to His Father concerning His

¹ Isa. iv, 1.

² 2 Cor. xi, 2.

³ Rom. v, 5.

disciples: 'I do not pray for these alone, but for them also who shall believe in Me through their word; that they may all be one; as Thou, Father, art in Me and I in Thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that Thou hast sent Me. And the glory which Thou gavest Me I have given them; that they may be one, even as we are one.'¹

If, therefore, those who believe in Christ are one, then wherever we find a member according to outward appearances, there, by the mystery of the sacrament, the whole body is present. And so whatever belongs to the whole applies in some measure to the part; so that there is no absurdity in one man saying by himself anything which the body of the Church as a whole may utter, and in the same way many may fittingly give voice to that which is properly said by one person. Hence, when we are all assembled together we can rightly say: 'Bow down thine ear O Lord and hear me: for I am poor and needy. Preserve my soul, for I am holy.'² And when we are by ourselves, there is no incongruity in our singing: 'Sing aloud unto God our strength: make a joyful noise unto the God of Jacob.'³ And it is not irrelevant that many of us say together: 'I will bless the Lord at all times: his praise shall continually be in my mouth';⁴ or that often when we are alone we sing with many tongues: 'O magnify the Lord with me, and let us exalt his name together'⁵ and other things of this kind. For on the one hand the solitariness of a single person does no harm to the words of many; and on the other the vast number of the faithful does not prejudice their unity since by the power of the Holy Spirit who is in each of us and fills the whole our solitude is manifold and our multiplicity singular.

CHAPTER SEVEN

But now let those who say 'Are we to ask a blessing of the stones and planks of our cells, or ask that the Lord be with them?' tell me why, when they are alone in their cells they say:

¹ John xvii, 20-22.² Ps. lxxxvi, 1-2.³ Ps. lxxxi, 1.⁴ Ps. xxxiv, 1.⁵ Ibid., 3.

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'O come, let us sing unto the Lord.' I pray you tell me, brothers, if I may speak with your good leave, whom do you exhort? Whom do you summon to the night-office of divine praise when you say 'Come let us sing unto the Lord' or 'Come let us adore the Lord King of martyrs'? These verses are called invitatories because by their means the congregation of the faithful is summoned to give praise to God. If then there is really no one to hear you, whom do you urge to sing to the Lord by these words of exhortation?

Come, I say, brethren and tell me whether you are not concerned with the mystery of the unity of the Church but rather with the number of those present in the flesh when you say: 'Arising in the night let us all keep watch' or 'Our limbs being rested by sleep, let us arise swiftly.' Why do you not either pass over in silence or put into the singular number all those hymns and prayers which the holy fathers composed in the plural?

Since you consider it wrong to ask or to give a blessing when there is no one else present, why, when you come to the lessons, do you read the homilies of the Fathers and the sermons of preachers, which by the very nature of the act of reading appear to be addressed to the people; so that all your words are directed, as it seems, to another person or to an audience. To take the very words of these homilies, to whom, may I ask, do you say: 'Listen, dearly beloved brethren' and so on, when no brethren are present? If you wish to adapt all these things by means of your protesting pen to your solitary state, you will find that it is impossible; and so you will have to leave them out and new ones will have to be composed for you. Why, when you come to the prayers, do you say 'Let us pray' when there is no one there to pray with you? If you can see no one, whom are you summoning to share in your prayer? Why when you have finished reciting the office do you follow the custom of saying: 'Let us bless the Lord' when there is no one at hand who will bless the Lord with you?

Consider carefully, therefore, all these things and those others which are too numerous to mention, and be punctilious

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in your observance of the laws of ecclesiastical custom whether you are alone or with others. For if the doctors of the Church had deemed it necessary, they would have given us one version of the offices of the Church for the use of solitaries and another for the use of communities; but by being content to compose one only, without any variation, they taught us to hold to this one order with inviolable respect. For they perceived that whatever is reverently offered up in God's service by any member of the Church is sustained by the faith and devotion of the whole body, since the Spirit of the Church, which gives life to the whole body which is preserved by Christ its Head, is one. The whole Church is composed of the joining together of its different members; but it is certainly a single body, established on the firm foundation of a single faith and filled with the power of one life-giving Spirit. This is why the Apostle says: 'There is one body and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling.'¹ And so it is good that whatever action in the holy offices is performed by any one section of the faithful should be regarded as the common act of the whole Church, joined in the unity of faith and the love of charity.

CHAPTER EIGHT

Now this is why, when in offering the Mass we say: 'Be mindful, O Lord, of Thy servants and handmaids', we add a little later 'For whom we offer, or who offer up to Thee, this sacrifice of praise'. These words make it quite plain that the sacrifice of praise is offered by all the faithful, women as well as men, even though it appears to be offered by the priest alone; for that which he performs with his hands in offering sacrifices to God is rendered pleasing by the earnest piety in the souls of the multitude of the faithful. This is made clear by another passage: 'We beseech Thee therefore, O Lord, graciously to accept this oblation of our service and that of Thy whole family.' These words make it even clearer that the sacri-

¹ Eph. iv, 4.

fice which is placed upon the holy altar by the priest is offered up by the whole of God's family. This unity of the Church was clearly proclaimed by the Apostle when he said: 'For we being many are one bread and one body.'¹ For so great is the unity of the Church in Christ that throughout the whole world there is but one bread which is the Body of Christ and one chalice which is the Chalice of His Blood. Just as the divinity of the Word of God is one and fills the whole world, so although that Body is consecrated in many places and on many days, yet there are not many bodies but the one Body of Christ. And just as this bread and wine are truly changed into the Body of Christ, so all those who worthily partake of it in the Church are made into the one Body of Christ, as He Himself bore witness when He said: 'He that eateth My flesh and drinketh My blood dwelleth in Me and I in him.'²

If, therefore, we are all one body in Christ and we who dwell in Him cannot be separated from one another in spirit even though we are separated in the flesh, I can see no harm in our observing, when we are alone, the common custom of the Church, since by the mystery of our undivided unity we are never apart from her. When I in my solitude utter the common words of the Church I show that I am one with her and that by the indwelling of the Spirit I truly dwell in her: and if I am truly a member of her it is not unfitting that I fulfil my universal duty.

CHAPTER NINE

Moreover the eyes, tongue, feet and hands each have their own particular function in the human body; yet the hands do not touch, the feet do not walk, the tongue does not speak nor the eyes see of themselves and for their own sake; the special function of each part of the body can be attributed to the whole. And those functions which belong to a particular member by virtue of its nature can be said to be performed by the body which is the whole, so that the whole may properly be

¹ 1 Cor. x, 17.

² John vi, 56.

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said to manifest the activity of its parts and the part that of the whole. That is why St. Paul's tongue could truthfully say: 'I suffer trouble in Christ's gospel even unto bonds',¹ although his tongue was not itself in chains; and he goes on to say: 'The word of God is not bound.' Peter and John ran to Christ's sepulchre, although it was only their feet which performed the act of running; Stephen saw the heavens opened, although seeing is the special function of the eyes. Isaac touched and felt his son Jacob, yet the power of touching and feeling belongs particularly to the hands. And so it is clear that any action of an individual member is the work of the whole body; and conversely each of the parts participates in the action of the body as a whole.

CHAPTER TEN

What cause for astonishment, then, is there in the fact that a priest, who is certainly a member of the ecclesiastical body, should when he is alone represent the whole Church in giving greeting and replying, saying 'The Lord be with you' and answering 'And with thy spirit'; or that he should afterwards both ask and give a blessing? For by the mystery of her inward unity the whole Church is spiritually present in the person of each human being who has a share in her faith and her brotherly love. Truly, the fact of aloneness cannot make the unity of faith a solitary thing, nor can the presence of many cause it to be divided. What harm does it do for many voices to come from one mouth if the faith they express is one? For, as I have already said, the whole Church forms a single body. The Apostle bears witness to this: 'For as the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of that one body, being many, are one body; so also is Christ. For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body';² and again: 'Christ's body, which is the Church.'

If, then, the whole Church is the one body of Christ and we are members of the Church why should we not, since we are

¹ 2 Tim. ii, 9.

² 1 Cor. xii, 12.

truly united to her, use when we are alone the words of the Church which is our body? Indeed, if we who are many are one in Christ, each of us possesses in Him the whole; and so although in our bodily solitude we seem to be far from the Church, yet we are most immediately present in her through the inviolable mystery of unity. And so it is that that which belongs to all belongs to each, and conversely that which is particular to some is also common to all in the unity of faith and love. So the people have a right to cry: 'Have mercy on me, O God, have mercy on me' and 'Make haste, O God, to deliver me; make haste to help me, O Lord'; and an individual man to say: 'God be merciful unto us and bless us.' Our holy fathers decided that this fellowship and communion of Christ's faithful ought to be a matter so certain that they made it an article of the creed of the Catholic faith and commanded us to observe it as one of the basic precepts of the Christian religion. For as soon as we have said 'I believe in the Holy Ghost and the holy Catholic Church' we add 'The communion of saints'; so that when we give witness to God of our faith we speak also of the fellowship of the Church which is one with Him. Now the communion of the saints in the unity of faith consists in this: they believe in one God, are reborn in one baptism, strengthened by one Holy Spirit, and admitted into the same eternal life by the grace of adoption.

Now just as the Greeks call man a microcosm, that is to say a little world, because his body is comprised of the same four elements as the universe itself, so each of the faithful is a little Church, since without any violation of the mystery of her inward unity each man receives all the sacraments of human redemption which are divinely given to the whole Church. If one man, then, can be said to receive the sacraments which are common to the whole Church, why should he be prevented, when alone, from uttering the words common to the whole Church, for the sacraments are so much more important than any words.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

In case there is still some perverter of our arguments who says: 'Those things which were instituted for the whole assembly of the faithful must under no circumstances be used by solitary individuals,' we will now give an example which has the authority of the Holy Scriptures themselves, so that he may be convinced by reason rather than by words. The book of Joshua tells us something which is well known; namely that the children of Reuben and Gad, and half the tribe of Manasseh, departing from the children of Israel out of Shiloh so that they might enter the country of Gilead, the land of their possession, built a great altar in the land of Canaan. The people of Israel were very angry and took up arms against them, asking why they had dared so rashly to build an altar other than the altar of the Lord. They answered that they had not done this as a transgression, but to secure a witness for the future; 'lest', they said, 'in time to come your children might speak unto our children, saying: What have ye to do with the Lord God of Israel? For the Lord hath made Jordan a border between us and you, ye children of Reuben and children of Gad; ye shall have no part in the Lord. So shall your children make our children cease from fearing the Lord.'¹

If there is anyone to whom it is not already clear, let me explain briefly why I have brought in this part of the story. It is to show that some of the brethren might, in their simplicity, be disturbed by the thought that they were in some way cut off from the body of the faithful if they did not dare, in their solitude, to use the common words of the Church in their prayers. And so they use these words that they may show that they still form part of the ecclesiastical body, and those same words bring peace to their unquiet souls by bearing witness to the spiritual presence of the faithful. For indeed the children of Reuben and of Gad built an altar, not for the offering of libations, but as an emblem of their unity with the people of Israel; and these others now say, as if they were their

¹ Joshua xxii.

children: 'Behold the altar of the Lord, which our fathers made, not for burnt-offerings nor for sacrifices; but as a witness between us and you.'¹ They did what they did as a witness of the fellowship of Israel, and we say what we say as a symbol of the true unity of the Church; they lest they be looked down upon by their brethren and we lest we be tormented by our thoughts. They built the likeness of an earthly altar; we declare the truth of spiritual unity; they for a witness to their children, and we to maintain the inviolable mystery of our new birth and the fellowship of our brethren.

CHAPTER TWELVE

Some of the things which the Church does seem unnecessary as far as human reasoning is concerned; but if we look at the mystery of their inward virtue we will see that they are divine. Who has not been amazed by the fact that canon law decrees that no man who has been married twice may ever be raised to the priesthood, and yet allows a priest who has committed fornication to be restored to his former office when he has done penance? What the Apostle thinks about fornication is perfectly clear: 'Neither fornicators nor idolaters nor adulterers shall inherit the kingdom of God.'² But of those who marry a second time he says: 'The wife is bound by the law as long as her husband liveth; but if her husband be dead she is at liberty to be married to whom she will; only in the Lord.'³ It is perfectly plain from these words that those who marry twice do not transgress the law of God; and that fornicators are cut off from the kingdom of God because of the excesses of the flesh.

What is the meaning of this, then? Why are those who have committed no sin deprived of all hope of the priesthood, while others whose guilt has cut them off from God's kingdom are not, provided they worthily do penance, deprived of the assurance of ecclesiastical rank? Unless for this reason: that second marriages, although not sinful, affect in some way the mystery of the Church. For just as Christ, the high-priest of

¹ Joshua xxii, 28.

² 1 Cor. vi, 9-10.

³ Ibid., vii, 39.

the good things to come, a true priest according to the order of Melchisedech, who on the altar of the Cross offered to God the Father the lamb of His own body for the world's salvation, is the husband of one bride, Holy Church, who is certainly a virgin since she keeps inviolate the unity of faith, so every priest is commanded to be the husband of one wife, so that he may bear the likeness of the great Bridegroom.

Thus, as far as those who have married twice are concerned, it is not the degree of sin but the nature of the sacrament which is important; they are rejected so that the mystical pattern of true priesthood may be preserved, not as a punishment for their sins. Otherwise the apostle would have numbered among the sins that which he permits to be done. And the holy canons number those who condemn second marriages among the Novatian heretics. We will, if we have not already said enough to maintain the mystery of ecclesiastical unity, proceed still further.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

I ask you now in all charity, brethren, whether if two brothers are together one of them may rightly say to the other 'The Lord be with you'. Is he not speaking in the plural to a single person, and setting aside literal meaning in observing the custom of the Church? For, according to the rules of speech, when he is speaking to an individual he should say: 'with thee', not 'with you'. And if it is wrong for him to address one man in the plural, he should always use the singular 'The Lord be with thee'. No one who has frequented the threshold of the Apostles can fail to know how inconsistent this is with the law of the Church. For there is no doubt that neither the most blessed bishop of the Holy See, when he is saying his private Mass with a single server, nor any bishop or priest of the Catholic Church uses this form of words in the singular.

If, then, we can approve the custom of the holy priests; if one man has the right to say to another 'The Lord be with you' without discord or contravention of the rules of ecclesi-

astical order, is there any reason why a single man by himself should not use this form of words, since as far as the literal meaning of the words goes there is little to choose in incongruity between saying it to oneself and saying it to one other person? Since, then, the authority of ecclesiastical custom is such that all the power of polished eloquence yields to it humbly; since it is far less concerned with words than with meaning, if the rules of grammar may be ignored when there are two men present, it follows that one man alone can set them aside without blame. Therefore, as the Church's authority permits the use of the phrase 'The Lord be with you' when only two are present, one man alone has the right to use the same phrase without going against her authority.

The same is true of the response 'And with thy spirit' and of the asking and giving of a blessing by and to the reader when one is alone. It is not the number of persons with which we are concerned, but rather the mystical unity of the Church, whose unity does not exclude a multiplicity of members and whose numerousness does not destroy her unity, since her one body includes many members and her many members make up a single body; neither is the wholeness of the body destroyed by the number of her members.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

It is not surprising that Holy Church is said to be many in one and one in many when you remember that the people of the earthly Israel, because they were related by birth, maintained among themselves this same pattern of unity. Moses sent messengers to the king of Edom, saying: 'Thus saith thy brother Israel.'¹ And again, when King Arad the Canaanite waged war against Israel and triumphed over them, having taken some of them prisoners, Israel vowed a vow to the Lord, saying: 'If thou wilt deliver this people into my hands, then I will utterly destroy their cities.'² We find another clear example in the Book of Kings, when the people of Israel said

¹ Num. xx, 14.

² Ibid., xxi, 2.

to the people of Judah, on David's return to his kingdom: 'I have ten parts in the King, and I have also more right in David than thee: why then didst thou despise me, that my advice should not be first had in bringing back my king?'¹

If that people could speak as one person because they all sprang from one stock, or rather, because they all worshipped one God, and thus show themselves to be one in many, how much more may holy Church, since she is made holy and governed by the one Spirit of God, filled with the mysteries of one faith and baptism, and called by the grace of adoption to take possession of one inheritance, have such a fellowship within herself that each member may use the words of all and all may use the words of each. And so it happens that when we are saying the Divine Office we often sing, in honour of a single saint, words which we know apply to the whole Church; this will be quite clear to you if you read the hymns to the Blessed Mother of God and the other saints carefully.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

Indeed the Church of Christ, which is an immovable pillar, to whom the keys of the kingdom of heaven were given, is not the slave of case and number, but binds under her own laws all the modes of speech. She is concerned with souls, not words, so she takes little notice of the presence of bodies or the moments of time, but considers the devotion and unity of souls. 'She judgeth all things, yet herself is judged of no man.'² This is why we say, when we are celebrating the holy solemnities of Easter: 'O God, who on this day through Thine only-begotten Son hast overcome death and opened unto us the gate of everlasting life', when we all know very well that that Pasch of the Jews, during which the Lord suffered and rose again, is past, and that the light of Paschal rejoicing shines upon us on the nearest Sunday. In the same way we say on the feast of the Ascension and at Whitsun 'today', since the time of their occurrence is determined according to the Easter

¹ 2 Sam. xix, 43.

² 1 Cor. ii, 15.

reckoning. And we celebrate the beheading of John the Baptist in the month of August, although it is almost certain that he was slain by Herod about the time of the Lord's Passion.

The same is true of the feast of St. James, and that of St. Peter-in-Chains. We read in the Acts of the Apostles: 'Herod, after he had killed James the brother of John with the sword, because he saw that it pleased the Jews proceeded to take Peter also.'¹ It goes on: 'Then were the days of the unleavened bread' and adds soon afterwards 'And when he had apprehended him, he put him in prison, and delivered him to four quaternions of soldiers to keep him, intending after Easter to bring him forth to the people'. It is clear from this that the actual events took place at one time of year and the festivals which celebrate them are instituted at quite another. For these feasts, as you know, are celebrated at the end of July, and however you search through the Old Testament you will not find that the Jews celebrated either their Pasch or the days of unleavened bread at that time. But since these feasts could not be celebrated properly during the Easter solemnities, the Church appointed another time for their observance.

I have given this short account of certain great feast-days so that you may clearly understand that Holy Church is not bound by the laws of time; rather, she governs the changes of time according to her pleasure. Nor does she serve the elements; it is they who are subject to and obey her. This is why the teacher of the Gentiles says: 'All things are yours, whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas, or the world, or life, or death, or things present or things to come; all are yours; and ye are Christ's, and Christ is God's.'² And in order to show how Holy Church excels in the greatness of her authority he says again to these same Corinthians: 'Do ye not know that the saints shall judge the world? and if the world shall be judged by you, are ye unworthy to judge the smallest matters? Know ye not that we shall judge angels? how much more things that pertain to this life.'³

¹ Acts xii, 2.

² 1 Cor. iii, 22.

³ 1 Cor. vi, 2-3.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

But, to return to the matter in hand, is it surprising that holy Church, to whom God has committed such power, should so change the words which serve her according to her wishes that individual men may utter the words of many, and the many those of individuals? Is there any reason why those words which are specially suited to some men should not be said by others? We know that when children are baptized, the priest says: 'What dost thou ask?' And not the child itself, but another, answers on its behalf: 'Faith,' etc. That which is the child's own reply is said by another. If one person may utter the words of another even in this holy sacrament of our regeneration, which is the source of all human salvation, why should not one man make answer for another when it is a question of an ecclesiastical greeting or the asking of a blessing? It is no innovation of modern foolhardiness to claim that one man may make the responses on behalf of another in the Church; it has the sanction of apostolic authority; for St. Paul said to the Corinthians: 'Otherwise, when thou shalt bless with the spirit, who shall occupy the place of the unlearned?'¹

It comes to this, that if any man is afraid to say: 'The Lord be with you' because he is alone, or even to reply 'And with thy spirit', then he must fear to say 'Let us pray'. He must say 'Let me pray' lest he should seem to summon to prayer those who are not there. He who thinks it sacrilege to ask a blessing when there is no one by, or to give one, must be careful not to say, after the reading: 'Do thou, O Lord, have mercy on us'; he must say: 'Have mercy on me.' If this seems ridiculous and stupid to him, then let him not be ashamed to utter the words of the Church when he is alone, since he knows that in mind and spirit he is never separated from her. Let him not declare by his words that he is separated from that body whose member he particularly professes to be; but, because the Church of Christ is truly one, let him fulfil the duty of his universality bravely; he must strive to maintain the power of the mystical

¹ 1 Cor. xiv, 16.

body, rather than to concern himself with the suitability of what he is saying.

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

Now as I have said before, there is much in the customs of the Church which seems on the surface to be worthless and trivial; but when we look at it more carefully we find that it is sustained by the weight of great worth. To take but a few examples: who, to look at the vestments of a priest, would think there was anything in them worthy of admiration, unless he realized what they symbolized? But if he sees them by the light of spiritual understanding, he knows why clerics' sandals have complete soles but only partial uppers. He reflects carefully upon the reason why the alb reaches to the heels and the amice is always made of linen; he ponders the meaning of the girdle and the stole; in the same way he wonders why the dalmatic is divided into four like a cross; why the chasuble is put on over all the other vestments and why the maniple is worn on the left arm; he will understand when the rheum has been removed from the eyes and nostrils of the spirit, not the flesh.

He will realize that there is a reason why the deacon, when he is not wearing a dalmatic, should wear a chasuble when he reads; and why the said dalmatic has a fringe on the left side. Nor does he foolishly make light of the custom that pontiffs wear a pallium over their vestments, just as a plate of gold was placed upon the forehead of the high-priest of old, for his honour and glory; on this plate the name of the Lord was engraved in a tetragram which meant 'Holiness to the Lord'; there were few letters, but they contained in themselves the power of a mighty understanding. But why do we go on indefinitely? Whatever is done in God's service, whether under the old dispensation or the new, is done by symbolic figures and allegories. The building of the tabernacle, the number of the Levites, the ceremonies of the priests, and indeed the rites of holy Church today demand that we should seek in them the

virtue of their spiritual meaning. And so we may say that there is a mystery hidden in the ministry since the hidden mystery of allegoric meaning is explained by the outward forms of worship.

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

Let us unfold here briefly the matter which we took in hand so that it may be made more clear and plain, leaving out those things which have been conveniently set forth elsewhere by learned commentators. Now the vice of arrogance is not unknown to some readers, especially to those who possess grace of speech; when their unbridled tongues run through the open fields of the Scriptures the spirit of pride invades their hearts, which love to be in favour with the multitude. While they guide others along the right road they themselves hasten down the by-ways of confusion and error. That is why it is customary to say to refectory readers: 'May the Lord remove from thee the spirit of pride.' And the reader asks a blessing with such submissiveness that it is not the priest but someone whom he appoints who blesses the man who is about to read; this is done so that at the very beginning of the reading humility may be brought in to counteract any feeling of pride which might arise.

The reason why the priest utters a greeting in church is this: that he may show that he is at peace with the whole assembly of the faithful. Our Lord commanded this in the Gospel, when he said: 'When ye stand praying, forgive, if ye have ought against any: that your Father also which is in heaven may forgive you your trespasses';¹ and again: 'If thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath ought against thee, leave there thy gift before the altar and go thy way; first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift.'² And so the priest before he offers sacrifice and prayers to God shows by this mutual greeting that he is bound to the faithful by the bond of brotherly love; he does this so that he may make this commandment of the Lord clear by his

¹ Mark xi, 25.

² Matt. v, 23-24.

outward actions, as well as keeping it in his heart. Because of this, he sees as present with the eyes of the spirit all those for whom he prays, whether or not they are actually there in the flesh; he knows that all who are praying with him are present in spiritual communion. And so the eye of faith directs the words of his greeting and he realizes the spiritual presence of those whom he knows to be near at hand. Therefore let no brother who lives alone in a cell be afraid to utter the words which are common to the whole Church; for although he is separated in space from the congregation of the faithful yet he is bound together with them all by love in the unity of faith; although they are absent in the flesh, they are near at hand in the mystical unity of the Church.

CHAPTER NINETEEN

But now I would like to say a little about the merits of the solitary life and to give you some idea of what I feel about the heights of that life by my praises rather than by my arguments. The solitary life is indeed a school of heavenly learning, a training in divine arts. There all that we learn is God; He is the way by which we proceed and through which we come to a knowledge of the highest truth. The hermitage is a paradise of delight where the fragrant scents of the virtues are breathed forth like sweet sap or glowing spice-flowers. There the roses of charity blaze in crimson flame and the lilies of purity shine in snowy beauty, and with them the humble violets whom no winds assault because they are content with lowly places; there the myrrh of perfect penance perfumes the air and the incense of constant prayer rises unceasingly.

But why should I call to mind these in particular? For the lovely buds of all the holy virtues glow there many-coloured and graces flourish in an undying greenness beyond the power of words to describe. O hermitage! delight of holy souls, un-failing in your inner sweetness. You are like the Chaldean furnace in which holy young men check the raging fire by the power of their prayers and put out the thronging, crackling

flames by the ardour of their faith; where their bonds are burnt and yet their limbs do not feel the fire; for they are loosed from their sins and their souls are stirred up to sing hymns in God's praise, saying: 'Thou hast loosed, O Lord, my bonds; I will offer to thee the sacrifice of thanksgiving.'¹ You are the kiln in which the vessels of the Eternal King are shaped; where they are beaten to an everlasting brightness by the hammer of penance and polished with the file of wholesome chastisement; where the rust of the worn-out soul is destroyed and the rough dross of sin is cast aside. 'The furnace proves the potter's vessel; and trial and tribulation prove righteous men.'²

O warehouse of heavenly merchants, in which are found the best of those wares for whom the land of the living is prepared! Happy market-place, where earthly goods are exchanged for those of heaven, and things eternal substituted for those which pass away! Blessed market, where life everlasting is set out for sale and may be bought by any man, however little he possesses; where a little bodily suffering can purchase the company of heaven and a few sparse tears procure everlasting gladness; where we cast aside worldly possessions and enter into the patrimony of our eternal inheritance! You, O solitary cell, are the wonderful workshop of spiritual labour, in which the human soul restores to itself the likeness of its Creator and returns to its pristine purity, where the blunted senses regain their keenness and subtlety, and tainted natures are renewed in sincerity by unleavened bread. The gifts you bestow are these: that while the countenance seems pale with fasting the soul is nourished with the fatness of God's grace; that he who was once so wrapped in darkness that he did not know himself can with a pure heart behold God. You lead man back to his beginnings and recall him from banishment to the heights of his ancient dignity. You make it possible for man to see, from the citadel of his mind, all earthly things flowing away beneath him and himself passing away in the stream of perishable things. You, O hermitage, are the tent of the holy army, the battlefield of the victorious host, God's fortress, 'the tower of

¹ Ps. cxvi, 16-17.² Ecclus. xxvii, 6.

THE BOOK OF 'THE LORD BE WITH YOU'

David builded for an armoury, whereon there hang a thousand bucklers, all shields of mighty men.¹ You are the battlefield of God, the arena of spiritual strife, the angels' amphitheatre, the wrestling-school of strong combatants, where the spirit struggles with the flesh and the strong is not overthrown by the weak. You are a rampart to those hastening to the fight, a bulwark for the strong, a protection for those fighters who never yield. Let the barbarian host which surrounds you rage; let them bring up their mantlets, hurl their fiery weapons and increase the number of brandished swords; those who dwell within your walls, armed with the breastplate of faith, rejoice in the invincible protection of their leader and are triumphant in the certainty that their enemies will be overthrown. It was said to them: 'The Lord shall fight for you, and ye shall hold your peace';² and to each singly: 'Fear not; for they that be with us are more than they that be with them.'³ You, O solitary life, are the death of vice and the life and kindler of virtue. The law exalts you; the prophets admire you; all men who have reached the heights of perfection have recognized your worth. It is to you that Moses owes his receiving of the Decalogue, because of you that Elijah saw the Lord's passing;⁴ through you that Elisha was clothed in a double portion of his master's spirit.

What more shall I say? The Redeemer of the world, at the very beginning of the work of redemption, made His herald a dweller in the desert, so that in the dawn of the new world the morning star of truth might rise from you, after whom was to come the full sun who was to bring light to the world's darkness by the glory of His splendour. You are Jacob's ladder, conveying men to heaven, and bringing angels to our aid. You are the golden highway leading men back to their native land, the racecourse which carries those who have run well onward to receive their crown. O eremitic life, you are the soul's bath, the death of evildoing, the cleanser of filth; you make clean the hidden places of the soul, wash away the foulness of sin

¹ Song of Sol. iv, 4.

² 2 Kings vi, 16.

³ Exod. xiv, 14.

⁴ 1 Kings xix.

and make souls shine with angelic purity. The hermit's cell is the meeting-place of God and man, a cross-roads for those who dwell in the flesh and heavenly things. For there the citizens of heaven hold intercourse with men, not in the language of the flesh, but by being made manifest, without any clamour of tongues, to the rich and secret places of the soul. The cell knows those hidden counsels which God gives to men. How fair a thing it is to see a brother in his cell pass all the night in singing psalms, keeping watch, as it were, over God's fortress; as he watches the stars move through their heavenly courses the psalms proceed in order from his lips. And as the earlier and later stars come to light alternating in their courses, so the psalms which proceed from his lips as from a day-spring come to an end as if keeping pace with the movement of the stars. He is carrying out the duty of his calling, and they are performing the task appointed to them; he in his chanting is reaching out inwardly towards the unapproachable light while they, one after the other, refresh his bodily eyes with visible light. And although each hastens towards his end by a different path, yet the heavenly bodies are in harmony with God's servant in their mutual obedience.

The hermit's cell sees when a heart is burning with the fire of divine love, and knows whether a man seeks the face of God with the constancy of perfect devotion. It knows when his soul is sprinkled with the dew of heavenly grace and when remorse waters it with flowing streams of tears; even if tears do not spring from the eyes of the flesh, yet the sorrowing heart is not far from floods of tears, for that which cannot be plucked from the branch of outward observation is nevertheless always preserved at the root of the moist and verdant heart. If the soul cannot be always weeping, it is enough that it should be sorrowful. The cell is a prison-house where precious stones are polished so that they may be used afterwards to adorn the temple without any wound of hammering.

You, O hermitage, are like the Lord's sepulchre; you receive those whom sin has slain and bring them again to life in God by the breath of the Holy Spirit. You are a sepulchre

from the confusion and trouble of this life, but you open the way to the life of heaven. Those who escape from the shipwreck of this stormy world find in you a haven of peace; those who were wounded in battle and flee from the enemy's hands see in you the dwelling-place of a skilful doctor. For as soon as they retire with a perfect heart into the shadow of your peak the bruises of their hurt souls and the wounds of their inner man are healed. It was of you that Jeremiah said: 'It is good that a man should quietly wait for the salvation of the Lord. It is good for a man that he bear the yoke in his youth. He sitteth alone and keepeth silence because he hath borne it upon him.'¹ He who dwells within you is lifted up above himself, for the soul which hungers for God raises itself above the sights of earth and stands upon the citadel of divine contemplation; it holds itself apart from the world's doings and soars on high on the wings of heavenly longing; when he is concerned with beholding Him who is above all things, man transcends himself as well as the rest of the lowliness of the valley of this world. The hermitage is indeed a spiritual dwelling-place, which makes proud men humble, gluttons sober, cruel men kind, wrathful men meek and those who hate burn with brotherly love. It bridles idle tongues and girds lustful loins with the girdle of shining chastity. You, O hermitage, cause light-minded men to be serious and jesters to cease uttering scurrilities; you make prattlers constrain themselves under the discipline of silence. You are the nurse of fastings and vigils, the guardian of patience, the teacher of purest simplicity; to you deceit and guile are unknown. You hold the wanderer in the chains of Christ, and make men of undisciplined behaviour repress their evil-doing. You know how to bring men to the peak of perfection and raise them to the height of perfect holiness. You make them smooth and polished, marred by no roughness; you make of them squared stones, fit for building the walls of the heavenly Jerusalem; they will not be shifted by the inconstancy of their behaviour but will remain immovable in their serious following of holy

¹ Lam. iii, 26-8.

religion. You make them strangers to themselves; you make the vessels of vice blossom with virtue. You are black but comely, like the tents of Kedar or the curtains of Solomon. You are the bath in which the shorn sheep are washed. You are like the fishpools of Heshbon. Your eyes are as the eyes of doves by the rivers of waters, washed with milk and fitly set. Indeed you are the mirror of souls where the human soul can behold itself clearly, supplying what is lacking, removing what is unnecessary, straightening what is crooked and rebuilding what is misshapen. You are the bridal couch on which a dowry is paid to the Holy Spirit and the happy soul is united to its heavenly spouse. Righteous men love you, and those who flee from you, deprived of the light of truth, do not know where to set their feet. 'If I do not remember thee let my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth, if I prefer not thee above my chief joy.'¹ Let us sing of you with cheerful voice in the words of David: 'This is my rest for ever: here will I dwell, for I have desired it. How fair and how pleasant art thou, O love, for delights.'² The beauty which adorned Rachel's countenance and that better part which Mary chose, which shall never be taken away from her, are both symbols of you. You are a garden of spices, the fountain of gardens, a pomegranate. Although your bark seems bitter to those who know you not, how lovely is that which is hidden within, how sweet is your marrow! Hermitage, you are an escape from the persecuting world, rest for the labourer, comforter of the sorrowful, a cool refuge from the world's heat, the rejector of sin and the freedom of souls. David sought you when he was suffering from the world's evils and endured the weariness of a dark and tormented heart: 'Lo, then would I wander far off and remain in the wilderness.'³

What shall I say of the others? The very Redeemer of mankind deigned to visit you and sanctify you by His presence at the beginning of His work. For after He had been washed in the water of baptism, as the Gospel tells us, immediately the Spirit drove Him into the wilderness: 'And he was there in the

¹ Ps. cxxxvii, 6.² Ps. cxxxii, 14.³ Ps. lv, 7.

wilderness forty days and forty nights, tempted of Satan; and was with the wild beasts.¹ Let the world recognize that it is in your debt, since it was from you that God came to embark upon his work of preaching and miracles. How terrible you are, O hermitage, to the evil spirits; there the monks' cells are raised like rows of tents in a camp, like the towers of Sion and the ramparts of Jerusalem against the Assyrians and against Damascus, for in these cells divers tasks are carried out in a common spirit; some sing psalms, others pray, some write and others toil at various manual labours. Are not those divine words: 'How goodly are thy tents, O Jacob, and thy tabernacles, O Israel! As valleys are they spread forth, as gardens by the river's side, as the trees of aloes which the Lord hath planted, and as cedar trees beside the waters'² applicable to you? What more shall I say of you, O solitary life, blessed life, pleasure-garden of souls, holy life, angelic life, hall of heavenly jewels, court of the senators of heaven? Your fragrance excels the fragrance of all spices, your taste is sweeter to the tongue of the enlightened heart than the dripping honeycomb or any honey. Whatever is said of you cannot do justice to your worth and merit, for the fleshly tongue cannot express what the spirit knows of you; no bodily organ of speech has ever revealed the sweetness of your inward savour at the heart's core. Those who know you love you; those who have rested in the delight of your loving embrace know the merits of your praise.

As for those who do not know these things, they can never know you. I know that I am unworthy to praise you; but I also most certainly know this, O blessed life, and have no hesitation in saying it: any man who strives to remain constant in the desire for your love dwells in you, and God dwells in him. Satan and his wiles are subject to him, and the devil groans to see him approaching that place from which he himself was banished. And having won a victory over the demons such a man is made the companion of the angels; an exile from the world, he is the heir of paradise; denying himself, he be-

¹ Mark i, 13.

² Num. xxiv, 5-6.

comes Christ's follower. And he who follows in His footsteps now will certainly, when he comes to the end of his journey, be raised to the glory of His fellowship. I say with all confidence that he who remains in the solitary life to the end of his days for the love of God will, when he quits this mortal dwelling, come to that glorious building, the house not made with hands, his eternal home in heaven.

CHAPTER TWENTY

See, beloved father, I have given you a problem to solve, impelled thereto by the inquiries of the brethren; and have not hesitated in the meanwhile to say what I myself thought. I did not do this, however, that I might usurp the authority of a teacher and venture to instruct others, but rather that I might make clear to you what I myself think in my inexperience. Thus, whatever is to be found in the foregoing arguments is simply set out for your inspection; it is not a categorical assertion or a definitive statement but a disquisition supported by reasons. Therefore, dearly beloved, I beg you to look carefully at all that I have written; if my assumptions are false, obliterate them with a sharp knife, but if, as a result of your teaching, they are consonant with sound doctrine, then strengthen them with the force of your own authority. I could have said what I had to say more briefly, but I must confess that it gave me pleasure to prolong my speaking to your sweet self while I had the opportunity. We are happy to spend a long time in pounding spices, especially when he in whose service they are to be used has himself so sweet a fragrance.

May almighty God command His servant Leo by secret inspiration to shed three tears or utter three sighs each day for me who am so wretched.

THE THIRTEENTH TREATISE OF
ST. PETER DAMIAN

On the Perfection of Monks

Peter the sinful monk sends to the venerable Lord Abbot O. . . . and to his holy community the duty of devoted service.

Even if a poor debtor cannot pay all that he owes, it is considered that he has fulfilled his obligation if he offers that little amount which he possesses. Often, indeed, a poor peasant who has borrowed money at interest is absolved from the obligations of his note of hand simply by bringing a gift of herbs to his creditor. And so I, who owe so much to your kindness, send this poor screed; poor, let me say, because of my clumsiness, not of its own nature, for its subject is the will of God, and it sets forth faithfully matters old and new.

CHAPTER ONE

You are well aware, my brothers (I say it with tears), into what lack of zeal our holy order has fallen, and does not cease to fall more deeply every day; so that now, having carelessly forgotten almost all its precepts, we seem to be content to wear merely the outward habit of our calling. Under the cloak of religion we live worldly lives, and outrage the spirit of discipline when we abandon ourselves to the flowing stream of pleasures, disgracing the title of our nobility, and vainly bearing the name of monks. We are like bastard sons, who delight in being called by their father's name, but whose dishonourable origin bars them by law from inheritance. Ishmael and the sons of Cethura were all equally said to be the sons of Abraham. But when the laws of succession came into effect, the inheri-

tance in all its entirety was bequeathed to Isaac, the lawful son: the sons of the concubines received only gifts; for Solomon says that bastard slips shall not send forth deep roots.¹ I beg you not to take my words as an insult to yourselves. For you know that it is best to lay the kindling at that point where some spark of fire seems to remain; who is so foolish as to blow upon ashes from which all heat has completely departed? Unless, through Christ's grace, I hoped for better things from you, I should regard it as a waste of time to forsake my other tasks and pursue you with hortatory letters.

Therefore, beloved, gather your forces, with Christ's aid, and do not bear the yoke of His service to whose banner you are pledged idly or weakly, but rather zealously and manfully; so that the foundation of your way of life, which stands at present in the middle way, may not through your carelessness return to nothing (which God forbid), but may, through the perseverance of your abiding fervour, reach the peak of perfection. Remember what was said to the angel of the Church of Sardis: 'Be watchful, and strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die; for I have not found thy works perfect before God.'² Since he did not find his works perfect before God, he declared that even those things which had been well done were at the point of death. If, therefore, that which is dead in us be not fanned into life, what remains alive in us will soon be extinguished. It is certain that he who does not bring his labours to completion loses the benefit of the work he has done. Of what use is it that a body begins to be formed in the mother's womb, if it does not reach the fullness of natural growth? You know well of what child it was said: 'A woman, when she is in travail, hath sorrow, because her hour is come; but as soon as she is delivered of the child, she remembereth no more the anguish, for joy that a man is born into the world.'³

CHAPTER TWO

God, who weighs the deeds of every person and office, of

¹ Wisd. of Sol. iv, 3.

² Rev. iii, 2.

³ John xvi, 21.

every state and rank most meticulously and carefully in the balance, and has different scales for each order, does not look with favour upon an abortive work. Did not he who wrote upon the wall with his finger: 'Thy kingdom is weighed in the balance, and thou art found wanting',¹ have a balance fit for weighing the works of a king, and place his deeds therein? And immediately after he added: 'Thy kingdom is divided, and given to the Medes and Persians.'

If, then, almighty God took from this man both his kingdom and his life, for no other crime than this, that there was not found in him that fullness of good works which becomes a king, what is to be thought of us, who in our monastic profession vowed that we would scale the heights of perfection, and yet lie inert in the valley of our shortcomings in a torpor of sloth? Why does a man strive with all his might to complete what he has begun? Only so that he may not lose all that his previous labour has won for him. Of what use is it, may I ask, for a man to set out on any road, if he does not reach his destination? In the same way, if a man has incurred the enmity of a king, and can only be re-established in his favour if he presents him with a hundred pounds of silver, and knows too that if he pays his debt to the king he will receive not only favour, but the distinction and insignia of some great office, would he not be foolish to allow ninety-nine pounds which he has already paid into the public treasury to slip through his fingers because he did not pay the remaining pound which was necessary to make up the amount? Is it not better for him to pay the little which was lacking in full, and to receive royal favour and great office, than to lose what he has given, and, which is more terrible, still to be subject to the king's wrath?

I make so bold as to say, brethren, that we have given ninety pounds of silver to Christ our king, for whose sake we have abandoned our possessions and spurned marriage; for whom we avoid the eating of meat, hold ourselves apart from the pomp and glory of the world, and exchange the splendour of worldly dress for our humble garb. These, I confess, are

¹ Dan. v, 27.

great and difficult things, and will be more greatly rewarded with divine gifts; but something is still needed before we can complete the payment of our debt and deserve admittance to the treasure-house of the eternal King. You ask what this is: the answer presents itself to me at once: obedience, love, joy, peace, patience and the other virtues enumerated by the teacher of the Gentiles.¹ But I wish to put it more succinctly, so that it may the more easily, and therefore the more firmly, stay in your minds. It is nothing other than this: a fervent love of God and mortification of yourself. For if those apostolic words which say: 'Always bearing about in our bodies the dying of the Lord Jesus' were alive in us, all our delight would necessarily be in God, since fleshly love would have nowhere to spread within us; our leaping fire would burn there with him, since it would find no room within ourselves. The truly wise man, he who is intent on the guarding of his salvation, watches over the curbing of his vices with such anxious care that he binds with the girdle of perfect mortification his loins and his reins, his belly and his flanks. He achieves this when the greedy gullet is kept in check; when the wanton tongue is compelled to be silent; when the ears are shut to scandal-mongering; when the eyes are forbidden to look upon unlawful things; when the hand is bound, for fear it should strike cruelly, and the foot, lest it should wander idly; when the heart is withstood, for fear it should envy the prosperity and happiness of another, or desire or covet that which is not its own, lest it should be cut off from brotherly love by anger, or raise itself above others in its pride, or succumb to the delights of enticing pleasure; lest it should be too much weighed down by grief, or lay itself open to the seductions of joy. Since, then, the human mind cannot be utterly empty, but must always be concerned with love of something, it must be completely surrounded with this wall of virtue; that which is not permitted to expand in its own surroundings must necessarily be carried above itself.

¹ Gal. v, 22-23.

CHAPTER THREE

Thus, when our mind begins to rest in its Creator and to taste those delights of inner sweetness, it soon rejects anything which it considers to be opposed to the law of God, and abhors whatever is not in harmony with the rules of eternal justice. And from this true mortification springs; this is how it happens that a man, bearing his Redeemer's cross, seems dead to the world. From now on, he takes no pleasure in frivolous gossip, nor does he waste time in idle conversation; he occupies himself with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs; he desires solitude and seeks a quiet place; the workshops where the brethren speak together and the cloisters of the monastery are to him like the public market-place; he searches for and takes pleasure in remote and lonely places; as far as he can, he avoids all human contact, so that he may the more easily stand in the presence of his Creator.

When this man has destroyed the citadels of the enemy; when he has trodden on the necks of the kings hiding in the cave and brought them to utter ruin; when he has overthrown the kingdoms of the sea and the plains and the mountains, what is left for him, except to possess the promised land in peace and security with the triumphant Joshua? What is the use of having left Egypt and crossed the Red Sea dryshod, if we are confined in the desert for forty years, and can neither return to the fleshpots nor enter by right of possession into the land flowing with milk and honey? We lie snoring in sleep, and drowse in idleness.

We may justly be reproached with those words which Joshua spoke to the seven tribes which had not yet received their inheritance: 'How long are ye slack to possess the land which the Lord God of your fathers hath given you?'¹ He is indeed a foolish soldier who is content with victory if he has not been eager in the fight beforehand; he is lacking in manhood if he desires to gain the victory before going out to battle. The farmer will be disappointed if, before he has

¹ Joshua xviii, 3.

laboured in the sowing of his seed, he seeks to reap the harvest; for it is certain that he who wishes to gather in the grain must first root out the bushes and briars. And the voice of God truly says to sinful man: 'Thorns and thistles shall it bring forth to thee';¹ this earth, if it is to produce a rich harvest, must first endure the hoe and the ploughshare; so that, having been cultivated by many afflictions and by the discipline of perfect mortification, it may be made beautiful with the abundance of all the virtues, which are like a crop of rich fruits.

Joshua figuratively urged the sons of Joseph to this work of husbandry when he said to them, who were complaining of the slenderness of their wretched portion: 'If thou be a great people, then get thee up to the wood country, and cut down for thyself there in the land of the Perizzites and of the giants, if mount Ephraim be too narrow for thee.'² Now, if I may without incongruity refer this to the matter in hand, he who has decided to be content with the Rule of the blessed Benedict alone has confined himself within the narrow territory of mount Ephraim. But listen, and you shall hear how the new Joshua urges you to the heights, and commands you to make haste towards a wider inheritance: 'We have written this rule in order that, by observing it, we may show ourselves to have some degree of goodness of life, and a beginning of holiness.'³ This is Mount Ephraim. But because he considers this portion to be a narrow one, he immediately goes beyond it to higher and broader things: 'But for him who would hasten to the perfection of religion, there are the teachings of the holy Fathers . . . the *Conferences of the Fathers* and their *Institutes*' etc.⁴ Because these are so well known to you, there is no need for me to name them.

CHAPTER FOUR

But, since we who are lukewarm and base in no way strive to reach the heights, would to God that we might at least

¹ Gen. iii, 18.

³ R.S.B. c. 73.

² Joshua xvii, 15.

⁴ Ibid., loc cit.

diligently plough the narrow fields of this little mountain; so that there might be no corner in all the precepts of the Rule so permitted to fall into neglect that it was not furrowed by the plough of our great efforts there where we see the most difficult and exalted precepts set forth as if these were a steep mountain or the living rock itself. For although we wish to be counted among the ranks of soldiers, we do not take the trouble to wear the badges of virtue. We set before the eyes of men an appearance of integrity, but we do not bother to show that we have its reality in the sight of the hidden Judge. For there are some (I cannot say this without lamentation) who enter into the new life of religion without abandoning the old ways of their former life; these indeed are Gibeonites, not Israelites. Now you know that the inhabitants of Gibeon, smitten by the fear of death, came to the Israelites in a cunning and deceitful way, clothed in old garments and shoes, and bearing mouldy bread and old wineskins and sacks; soon after their lives were restored to them by means of the treaty which they obtained, their fraud was brought to light. Now Joshua, having learned of their guile, cursed them, and decreed that they must be hewers of wood and drawers of water for ever.

These Gibeonites, who go over to the Israelites through fear of death, symbolize those who take refuge in the ranks of the servants of God, not because they love perfection but because they tremble at the thought of the enormity of their crimes. Many of them, changed in outward appearance but not in heart, carry dry bread to eat because they have as yet no knowledge of the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth. They are clothed in old garments because, not having put off the old man, they do not know how to put on the new man which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness.¹ And all that they do seems hardened with age, because they persist in the evil ways of their old life, heedless of the words of the Apostle: 'Be renewed in the spirit of your mind.'² Those words which say: 'Old things are passed away; behold,

¹ Eph. iv, 24.

² Ibid.

all things are become new',¹ do not apply to them. They appear on the surface to have come to a new way of life; but in reality they remain in the old; for their behaviour does not bear witness to any reformation of their habits or new intention. And such as these are punished by a curse; nor will they be permitted to share the inheritance of the Israelites. For they are not numbered among those to whom it is said: 'Ye are thereunto called, that ye should inherit a blessing.'² Now water is tasteless and wood is hard. And so they are commanded to hew wood and to draw water; for being ignorant of the savour of spiritual wisdom, they must concern themselves with the hard and savourless tasks of outward labour. And although they may seem by their service in these outward things to confer some benefit on the Church, yet, because they live as slaves, they cannot enter into possession of the inheritance of the Israelites.

CHAPTER FIVE

Nevertheless, some of these men, if admonished frequently and sternly corrected, if told of the heavy penalty which is their due, and threatened with the terror of the last judgment, will pass from servitude to freedom and rise up with the rest to establish their right to a share of the inheritance. They are symbolized by those tribes who were given, first by Moses, and then by Joshua, the task of cursing, as the Scripture bears witness: 'And all Israel, and their elders, and officers, and their judges stood on either side of the ark before the priests, the Levites, which bare the ark of the covenant of the Lord, as well the stranger, as he that was born among them; half of them over against Mount Gerizim, and half of them over against Mount Ebal. Now they who stood over against Mount Gerizim blessed the doers of the law; but they who stood over against Ebal cursed the transgressors of the law.'³ Those whose office it was to bless symbolize those who seek the Lord's

¹ 2 Cor. v, 17.² 1 Pet. iii, 9.³ Joshua viii, 33; Deut. xxvii, 12-13.

service not through fear of punishment, but in the hope of heavenly reward and for the love of perfection, and who in all the actions of their holy lives bless God without ceasing. But those who were appointed to curse are like those who do not burn with love of perfection or yearn with desire for heavenly glory, but who observe the precepts of the law to escape the pains of hell.

They are appointed to curse so that, while so doing, they may themselves return to a knowledge of what is right, and, pondering on the penalties which are meted out to sinners in the Scriptures, restrain themselves by fear from the evils of sinning. And so it clearly follows that those tribes which were appointed to bless are the nobler; they are the sons of the wives. Those appointed to curse are baseborn, the sons of handmaidens, namely Gad and Asher, Dan and Naphtali, and among them Reuben, who dishonoured his father's bed and Zabulon, the youngest son of Leah.

It is noteworthy that we are told that all stood around the ark of the covenant, for none of them, whether baseborn or noble, whether lukewarm or fervent in their love of God, abandon holy Church. Now all these things were commanded by Moses, but put into execution by Joshua long afterwards. Moses represents the Law, and Joshua the Gospel. Not only did the old Law foretell that blessing was due to the just and that cursing would be meted out to sinners; the grace of the new Gospel has shown this to be so. But although some are noble, whose task is to bless, and others baseborn, who tremble with fear of being cursed; yet all alike, because they make common cause against the enemy, because they labour together perseveringly to establish their right to the promised land, shall be granted a portion, and they shall be co-heirs with one another without any distinction of right. Nevertheless, it is far more glorious that we, being zealous and strong, should be found to be invested with the titles of nobility, than that because of our weakness we should be marked by our base inferiority.

Let us then fly from Ebal; and we must even more greatly

despise the Gibeonites; so that we may not bear the yoke of slavery through being involved in outward observance alone, nor be reduced by our idleness to the status of baseborn sons, held in check only by the fear of hell. Let us establish our right to our inheritance with the weapons of virtue, so that we may extend the boundaries of our estate by the unremitting labours of our husbandry. But perhaps some idle fellows will reply in those words which the Scripture tells us the sons of Joseph used to Joshua: 'The hill is not enough for us: and all the Canaanites that dwell in the land of the valley have chariots of iron.'¹ Such as these seek the heights, but fear those who dwell in the depths; for they strive to hasten towards the summit of virtue, but mistrust their ability to overcome the promptings of the vices of the flesh. But they are not allowed to sit back like weaklings; in the same place they are given their answer: 'Thou art a great people, and hast great power: thou shalt not have one lot only: but the mountain shall be thine, and thou shalt cut down the wood and clear a space in which to dwell; and the outgoing from it shall be thine.'² And to give greater courage to the faint-hearted, almighty God Himself cries out: 'Them will I drive out from before the children of Israel.'³ And Joshua encourages the warriors of the heavenly army, and promises them an easy victory over their enemies: 'Fear not, nor be dismayed, be strong and of good courage: for thus shall the Lord do to all your enemies, against whom ye fight.'⁴

CHAPTER SIX

There is another matter, dearest brethren, if I may speak familiarly to you as fellow-workers, of one mind in Christ; I would humbly beg you to renounce a certain custom which is observed in several monasteries of my acquaintance. Some rulers of monks, attributing to the power of the monastic rule more than is profitable, impose no penance on those coming from the world, however seriously these may have sinned,

¹ Joshua xvii, 16.³ Ibid., xiii, 6.² Ibid., loc. cit.⁴ Ibid., x, 25.

other than the observance of the common way of life of the monastery. How thoughtless, how cruel, and above all how unwise this is, those who know anything at all of the matter will understand. For these men condemn their hearers to the mean condition of the Ebalites; they deprive them of zeal for penance; they do not exhort them to absolve their obligations and then, out of love of perfection, to seek the heights, but teach them to lie inert in shameful sloth, for ever held back by their fear of punishment, bound by their promise to pay their debts; so that they cannot, with those who stand by Mount Gerizim, bless the Lord in safety, but must stand by Mount Ebal with the sons of the handmaidens, terrified by the javelins of cursing. He who acts like this obviously does not know the difference between ten thousand talents and a hundred pence. For if we take into account the law of discretion, it is clear that the burden of satisfaction laid on each man must be in proportion to the weight of his crimes. He who has borrowed an ounce will repay it more easily than he who has borrowed a pound; nor must the man who steals a sheep be compelled to make the same reparation as him who steals an ox.

If we consider the matter carefully, we will find that the very apostles themselves, the princely founders of our knowledge and our leaders in the Christian faith, had different tasks and fates given to them to correspond to the shortcomings of their former lives. St. Paul, because he took a cruel part in the murder of Stephen, endured more torments and pains than the others; St. Peter wiped out the stain of his marriage in the blood of his martyrdom; but John, choosing to be a virgin, was loved more than all the rest; and because, having renounced the world in boyhood, he committed no serious sin, he passed from this world not in the torments of martyrdom but sweetly and peacefully as one who falls asleep. And if that splendid preacher St. Paul could say: 'I am the least of the apostles, that am not meet to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God';¹ if he chastised his body and

¹ 1 Cor. xv, 9.

brought it into subjection;¹ if he refused for himself that right which he allowed to others, of living by the Gospel, and earned his bread by the work of his own hands; if he, whose labours were greatest of all, feared that he had not attained his goal; if he, I say, who had performed such splendid works of virtue, could yet have no faith in his apostleship, how dare we poor wretched creatures presume to rely on our slothful monastic life?

It is true that the man who takes refuge in the monastic life puts an end to his evil-doing. But what is the good of ceasing to commit sins unless we also endeavour to wipe out those which we have already committed, atoning for them by severe penances? If you do not believe me, see what the blessed Pope Gregory says about this in his book on the Pastoral Care: 'Those who have given up their sinful ways, but do not weep for them, must be warned, lest they think that the sins to whose number they have ceased to add, but which they have not cleansed by their tears, are already absolved.' These matters are so clearly and so reasonably set forth there that he who reads it through carefully will have no further doubts on the subject; I have not added any more of it here because I wish to avoid wearying you by being verbose. How indeed can he be sure that his offences will be pardoned who, coming to a place of penitence, performs no penance?

It may perhaps be said that the rule does not prescribe for those coming from the world any fast except the common one. To this I answer that St. Benedict, in setting down his rules for monks, did not destroy those holy canons which deal with sinners; rather, he gave new strength to all the writings of the Catholic Fathers. To those who embark on the monastic profession he gave a rule of life; he did not, however, remit the sinner's obligation to do penance; for otherwise there might be just complaints and murmurings both from the boys and from those grown men who come to the monastic life without having committed serious sin if they were forced to follow the same rule of life as those burdened with sin. If we must never

¹ 1 Cor. ix, 27.

fast or perform any other act of penance otherwise than it is prescribed in the Rule, why does St. Benedict command: 'The superior may break his fast for the sake of the guests, unless it happens to be a principal fast-day' ?¹

Make haste now, and read, scan the pages, turn over the leaves, make a most diligent search; and then show me where the holy doctor has commanded by his authority the observance of this 'principal fast-day' which he mentions here in passing. When you fail to find the place, you will be bound to admit that the holy man did not wish us to observe only those things which he himself set down, and that he did not annul the precepts of the earlier Fathers in establishing his own. But, lest any man should be so bold as to reproach me, saying that by my disparagements I am sitting in judgment upon and making light of our holy order, let me say here that I have so high a regard for it as to think it second in dignity only to the apostolic order, and confess that it is no less than a second baptism. But I wish to repeat also the words of the prince of the apostles to certain men who wished to be converted: 'Repent; and be baptized every one of ye.'² By what stretch of the imagination can that man who does not trouble to weep for the sins he has committed be said to be safe, when the greatest shepherd and teacher of the Church believed that penance was a necessary condition of that sacrament which has more power than any other to absolve us from sin? The holy rule is set forth with skilful discretion and regulated with balance and moderation for the benefit of those who truly desire to renounce the world, and who do so freely, out of love for perfection, not for the sake of those who, aghast at the enormity of their crimes, are compelled by necessity to flee from it. It was written, I say, for those who come out of love for obedience; not for those who are dragged to the monastery by the fear of hell; for those who desire to grow in grace, not for those who endeavour to escape punishment. This is quite plain at the very beginning of the rule if we carefully consider to whom it is that the Holy Spirit directs his words.

¹ R.S.B. c. 53.

² Acts ii, 38.

I say the Holy Spirit. For it was certainly not that holy and humble man St. Benedict who, at the very beginning of his work, sat himself in the master's seat and usurped the place of the loving Father: 'Hearken, O my son, to the precepts of thy Master, and incline the ear of thine heart; willingly receive the admonition of thy loving Father.'¹ Rather, the Holy Spirit made his servant the instrument of his voice, just as he did at the beginning of the books of prophecy, when he cried, through Isaias: 'I have nourished and brought up children.'²

Let us see, then, to whom he directs what he has to say, for what sort of man all that follows is written. He says: 'To thee, therefore, my words are now addressed, whoever thou art that, renouncing thine own will, dost take up the strong and bright weapons of obedience, in order to fight for the Lord Christ, our true king.'³ As far as we can gather from the words of the holy man, the school of the holy Rule was established more for the learning of obedience than for the performance of penance. This is not to say that it excludes either the sinner or the just man, or rejects any sort of person; but rather that its whole strength and purpose lies in the teaching of the rules of obedience.

I know that in writing in this way I am displeasing some of the brethren, namely those who believe that a turning to our way of life brings about both the absolution of our offences and the perfection of virtue. I hope it may be enough if I reply that in setting forth my opinions I have no desire to cast a snare upon any man, as the Apostle says,⁴ but rather wish to urge you on towards the good. You may wonder why I write at such length on these matters; let me explain myself, so that you may see that they are not irrelevant. A certain brother came to us from a monastery, and confessed to me the sins which he had committed as a layman. If I understood rightly, it seemed to me that according to the decrees of the holy canons he was bound to perform seventy years' penance. He had been wearing the habit of religion for almost seven years;

¹ R.S.B. Prol.² Isa. i, 2.³ R.S.B. Prol.⁴ 1 Cor. vii, 35.

but when I asked him how much penance he had already done for these sins, he replied that he had confessed all these matters to the Lord Abbot, who had imposed upon him no other penances above and beyond the common practice of the monastery; because he declared that his changed way of life was in itself enough to procure full absolution for all his sins. What can I say? I must admit that I was gravely displeased by all this; I looked down, I trembled, I cried that the man had been misled; for he had not even begun to do his penance, whereas if only he had imposed upon himself certain mortifications, he could already have completed it.

CHAPTER SEVEN

I trust that these and many other matter, of which some deluded men, who believe themselves to be acting rightly, are unaware, are displeasing to you also, dearly beloved; and that, since you have the power by your free authority to correct these men in other matters of sin, you will show them that these also are to be shunned that they may the more carefully avoid them. But let us return to the matter in hand. The Holy Rule has become a great and spacious mansion, in which all sorts and conditions of men may dwell, boys and old men, the strong and the weak, the delicate, and those who differ from one another in every conceivable way. And so we must not deceive ourselves with a vain belief in our own safety; we must not boldly claim for our own behaviour all the forbearance of the Rule. Although the public highway is open to all travellers, he is a foolish voyager who endeavours to take up the whole of its width with his great strides. The spring which flows in the centre is for any man's use; but he who wants to claim the whole for himself is an arrogant fellow. I believe that the same is true of the mildness of the Holy Rule; and I beseech you that every brother who is concerned for his salvation should recognize his own capacities and adopt for his own use not all the indulgence which the rule permits, but only as much as is necessary to him. For the commands of

authority are one thing, and kindly indulgence quite another. A command cannot be ignored without sin; but while it is not wrong to take advantage of relaxations, it is good not to do so. Clear proof of what I wish to say can be found in the words of the Rule itself, if we look carefully. St. Benedict says in one place: 'Considering the infirmity of the weak, we think that one half pint of wine a day is sufficient for each: but let those to whom God gives the endurance of abstinence know that they shall have their own reward.'¹ Now the same may be said of the drinking of wine by monks as the Apostle says of marriage: 'But I speak this by permission, not of commandment.'² And he goes on to say: 'For I would that all men were even as I myself. But every man hath his proper gift of God, one after this manner, and another after that.'³

The Apostle desired one thing, but allowed another. He desired that all men should be as he himself was, free from the entanglements of marriage; but since he could not convince them of this, he was compelled by necessity to allow marriage, thinking it better that they should lie on the marriage-bed like sick men than that they should break their necks by falling into the abyss of riotous living. But blessed is the man who listens to the Apostle when he commands that which he desires, rather than when he permits that which he does not desire. In the same way, the author of the Holy Rule, with carefully weighed discretion, commands some things by virtue of his authority, and permits others of necessity because of the frailty of the weaker brethren. Now when he says: 'Although we read that wine ought by no means to be the drink of monks',⁴ and elsewhere: 'Although the life of a monk ought at all times to have about it a Lenten character, yet, since few have strength enough for this',⁵ and many other things of this kind, it is just as if he were saying: I show you the heights, but, seeing that you are still hobbling along on weak limbs, I lead you through the plains; if anyone has sufficient strength, though, let him leave the level ground which I unwillingly

¹ R.S.B. c. 40.² 1 Cor. vii, 6.³ Ibid., 7.⁴ R.S.B. c. 40.⁵ Ibid., 49.

allow you to traverse and go to the high places which I long for. It is certainly better to save one's soul in Segor than to be destroyed by fire and brimstone in Sodom. It is better to marry than to burn. But how much more glorious to scale the mountain-tops than to remain in mean obscurity in wretched Segor!

To return once more to my subject, it is undoubtedly better to live slothfully in the spiritual order than to perish utterly in the life of the world. But how much finer it is to wipe out at once all the marks of vice and to hasten with burning desire to the peaks of virtue than to sleep away our time in idleness, our only safeguard the profession which we have made. It is as if the promulgator of the Holy Rule were to say to his hearers: If you take advantage of the concessions which I make, it is not sinful; but if you do not do so, you shall be rewarded; you will incur no punishment if you are gentle to yourselves, but if you renounce indulgence for the Lord's sake you will win a crown—this is for those who are not burdened by sin. As for the rest, he who knows that he has done unlawful things must now abstain even from that which is lawful; he who in his pride has done that which is forbidden must now humbly renounce that which is permitted. Many who live soft and easy lives, when they are urged to follow a stricter and narrower road, plead and argue in their own defence; one of them will say: I live as I am commanded to do; when I take advantage of concessions I keep the precepts of the Rule. Then, that he may seem, as befits a conqueror, to fight from a superior position, he springs forth into boldness: Does the Rule deprive me of my liberty to do these things, and others like them? Does it not rather permit me to do so? Truly, those who argue in this way have not learned to distinguish between what the writer wishes and what he is compelled to permit; they have not recognized the fact that some things are allowed as concessions, whereas others are the commands of authority.

Such a man as this must die in the desert, for while he is dwelling in shame among the pleasures of the flesh, he cannot

strive to obtain by his labours and struggles the land which is his right; or else he has established himself with the people of Reuben and Galaad before crossing the Jordan and so has not deserved to possess the land flowing with milk and honey with the other tribes after their victory; he has set a limit to his efforts. And because while he is still on his journey he believes that he has already reached his home, he does not win his portion of that inheritance in which alone is true rest and abiding peace.

CHAPTER EIGHT

For our whole new way of life, and our renunciation of the world, has only one end: rest. But a man can only come to that state of rest if he stretches his sinews in many labours and strivings so that, when all the clamour and disturbance is at an end, the soul may be lifted up by the grace of contemplation to search for the very face of truth. Since we may only attain this rest, as I have said, through our labour and strife, how can any man find it who has not yet engaged in those battles which are here appointed to us? How can anyone enter the king's palace without crossing the forecourt which lies outside it? How shall that man who has not learned to sow seed, who has not pruned his vine-shoots or broken up the clods of earth with a hoe or ploughed his virgin fields, gather into his barns the threshed grain, or fill his casks from the flowing streams of new wine?

Now it is well known that Laban had two daughters, and that Jacob desired the younger of them in marriage, but that he could not come to her arms until he had taken to himself her elder sister, unwittingly and therefore unwillingly. But since you to whom I speak know all this, there is no need for me to give a lengthy account. Now, *Laban* means 'cleansing'. Every man who turns to God is cleansed from the blackness of sin by the grace of absolution. God Himself promised this, when He said: 'Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow.'¹ This that happy sinner declared who said:

¹ Isa. i, 18.

'I shall be clean; wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.'¹ *Leah* means 'labouring': *Rachel* means 'the word' or 'the vision of the beginning'. If we read the Scriptures carefully, we find that Jacob did not serve for a single day because he desired Leah, but that he endured all those weeks and years of servitude for Rachel alone; moreover, we find that he bore with the sight of Leah. Does any man turn to God that he may endure labour and tribulation, and suffer temptation? Every man who seeks God does so with one hope and aim: that he may find rest; that he may rest in the joy of the highest contemplation as if in the arms of the lovely Rachel; in other words, that through the word which he hears he may aspire to that vision of the beginning which he has sought.

But he must be tried in the heat of many battles before he can attain that quietness of intimate sweetness which he desires. He must first bear the yoke of slavery, so that afterwards he may by right be raised to the stature of perfect freedom. He serves his seven years under cleansing grace when he keeps those seven commandments of the Decalogue which are concerned with love of one's neighbour; so, impelled at first by fear and bowed down by the yoke of slavery, he may at least make a start with the commands of the Old Law, so that he honours his parents, does not commit adultery, does not kill or steal or bear false witness, or covet another's wife or his neighbours' goods. When he has observed all these precepts he is not, as he had hoped, brought straightway to the joys of contemplation, to enjoy, as it were, the long-awaited beauty of Rachel; in her stead, he must share his bed with Leah, whom he does not desire, for while we dwell in the darkness of human ignorance we are enjoined to be patient in labour. And yet he has many children of her, for through his striving he obtains the rich fruits of spiritual profit.

And so he bears with her, that he may come at last to that other who he loves without ceasing. He is persuaded to toil in servitude for another seven years; for it is necessary that he keep yet another seven commandments, but more freely, being

¹ Ps. li, 7.

now no longer a servant of the Law, but a son of the Gospel; in other words, he must be poor in spirit and meek, he must mourn, and hunger and thirst after righteousness, he must be merciful and pure in heart, and finally he must be a peacemaker. Now, if it were possible, men would wish not to endure labour and suffer trouble; they would desire to come at once, at the very beginning of their apprenticeship, to the delights of fair contemplation. But these things cannot be in the land of the dying, only in the land of the living; that is the meaning of what Laban said to Jacob: 'It must not be so done in our country, to give the younger before the first-born.'¹ And she is rightly called the elder who comes first in the order of time. Now in the training of men, the labour of good works comes before the peace of contemplation. Therefore, when these two spans of seven years are over, the one of the old law, the other of evangelic grace, he comes at last to the arms of Rachel whom he has desired for so long; for he who would attain to the joys of heavenly contemplation must first strive to fulfil the precepts of both Testaments.

CHAPTER NINE

But, since no good man is content within the bounds of his perfection, and desires to bring forth, out of his spiritual abundance, sons for the Lord, after Jacob had been joined in marriage to the two sisters he did not hesitate to take to himself their handmaidens also, so that he might sow the seed of a richer posterity. In order that we may understand that all things abound in the mysteries of the spirit, the names of the handmaidens are shown to have a symbolic meaning also. Now *Bala* means 'of long standing'. Certainly, because the human tongue cannot convey in bare words the meaning of a spiritual substance, in the teaching of wisdom it sometimes strives to instruct its hearers by the use of worldly images. These images are brought to mind from our old life which was given over to the bodily senses; they are used for our instruction when

¹ Gen. xxix, 26.

we are listening to something concerning the incomprehensible and unchangeable essence of the Godhead. Rachel, therefore, preferred rather to have sons by her handmaid than to remain completely barren; for the teaching of wisdom, the grace of contemplation conveys to her hearers by means of outward knowledge and the forms of visible objects those things which she hides in the secret places of the mind concerning things invisible; and so, in a way, she has sons by her handmaid when she bears spiritual children to the Lord through that knowledge which is more lowly than herself.

Zilpah means 'open-mouthed'; so this handmaid is the type of those whose mouths are open in the preaching of the Gospel, but whose hearts are shut; of whom it was written: 'This people honoureth me with their lips; but their heart is far from me',¹ and of whom the Apostle says: 'Thou that preachest a man should not steal, dost thou steal?'² Nevertheless, Leah received sons from this handmaid to be heirs with the others; for the active life has gained many sons of the kingdom through such preachers, of whom Truth Himself said: 'All whatsoever they bid you observe, that observe and do, but do ye not after their works.'³ And the Apostle says: 'Every way, whether in pretence or in truth, Christ is preached; and I therein do rejoice, yea, and will rejoice.'⁴

That is enough from the pages of the holy writings, since I do not intend to expound the whole of the Scriptures. But let us remember from all this that just as Jacob took to himself all those women and had sons by them for Rachel's sake alone, so whoever, established in cleansing grace, desires to bear fruit for God out of his spiritual abundance, must strive always to obtain the grace of contemplation.

CHAPTER TEN

But what shall we say of this, when we see that some who

¹ Matt. xv, 8.

² Matt. xxiii, 3.

³ Rom. ii, 21.

⁴ Phil. i, 18.

dwell in the house of Laban are so slothful and heedless that they neither strive for the beauty of Rachel nor toil for Leah? Such are those men who, established in a monastery, neither pursue the grace of contemplation by means of solitude and persistence in prayer, nor chastise themselves by the severity of their fasting and labours. They are either completely free from the bonds of marriage, or else satisfied with the embraces of the handmaids; because they either have the leisure of the utterly idle, or if they do anything, do it not with a view to bringing forth the fruit of the active or the contemplative lives, but rather that they may appease the hunger of their will and desires.

These are they who, whatever they are doing, always want to be wandering about and rushing from one place to another; who, since they cannot be calm, wish to appear obedient, and who therefore conceal the diseases of vice under which they labour beneath a cloak of righteous behaviour. They are not worn out by toil for obedience sake; they resolve, rather, to obey their superiors so that they may not lose the opportunities which their work provides; for they endure idleness, but enjoy work, because the roaming about and turning of the mill of affairs is sweet pleasure to them. For there are some palsied souls which love to trouble themselves with much running about. If a man is suffering from the disease of bodily paralysis he is frequently roused and shaken by his attendants, so that in this way he may be revived. Truly, these spiritual paralytics must either be said to be united to the handmaids alone, in which case their sons have no right of inheritance, or, if they consider themselves free, do not wish, if I may put it so, to unite themselves with the handmaids for the sake of the daughters of Laban, but, reversing the order, desire to be joined with the daughters for the sake of the handmaids; they do not toil for obedience' sake, but rather obey in order that they may toil. Nor do they follow Jacob's example in applying the fruits of their work to the active and contemplative lives; if their works show any mark of the active life, or if they say anything concerning the contemplative life, it is not that they

seek the fruits of spiritual profit, but only that they strive after the authority of their own wills.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

Moreover (if I may speak angrily) those who follow the rabble of grammarians, who, forsaking spiritual studies, desire to learn all the follies of worldly skill, who, despising the rule of Benedict, love to apply themselves to the rules of Donatus;¹ such as these are of that number. These men are bored by the intricacies of ecclesiastical teaching and long for worldly knowledge; this is like deserting the chaste spouse lying upon the bridal-couch of faith and consorting with the harlots of the stage. Seduced by the charms of whores, they reject the free women, so that when they have broken their marriage-contract they may be joined to the bondwomen. They have deserted the daughters of Laban and gone to the women of the brothels; and so indeed they seem old, like Bala, and skilled in empty sophistication of speech like Zilpah. No doubt they will say that the reason why they labour at these frivolities of worldly learning is so that they may derive richer profit from their spiritual studies. Did not Jacob endure the embraces of the concubines as a result of his wives' pleas? If it had been otherwise their children would have borne the stigma of illegitimacy and could not have shared in the inheritance. So they look for the support of the authority of the Fathers, and read them diligently.

They argue, then, that since Holy Scripture allows a wife to give her handmaiden to her husband so that he may have children, monks may spend their time in the pursuit of worldly knowledge. But if Gregory, Jerome and other holy doctors deny this, then they must know that they have been led astray by the unlawful love of loose women; and that their behaviour is equivalent to a treacherous flight against the marriage-contract. For we are not only forbidden to strive for such worthless learning after we have made our holy profession;

¹ See note 1, p. 16.

we are also commanded to reject all that is unnecessary of what we had previously learned. So the law of Moses decrees that a woman taken in battle and chosen by the victor to be his wife shall be deprived of all bodily superfluities: 'She shall shave her head and pare her nails; and she shall put the raiment of her captivity from off her, and shall remain in thine house, and bewail her father and her mother a full month: and after that thou shalt go in unto her, and be her husband, and she shall be thy wife.'¹ We shave the head of the woman when we cut away all thoughts and opinions which are unnecessary to the pursuit of rational learning: we pare her nails when we prune out the dead works of superstition. And she is commanded to lay aside the clothing in which she was captured so that she may strip off the acquired surface of idle tales and fictions and show forth the real truth of right reason.

She mourns for her father and mother because we must believe that the authors of the liberal arts are dead, and weep with compassion for them, who have perished in error. Now it is the nature of women that they should be cleansed each month by an effusion of their blood; and so we are ordered to go in to this woman after a month, so that when art and learning have been purified from all taint of superstition we may receive them in marriage; having become an Israelite she may be wedded to an Israelite and may yield up a rich offspring of spiritual works. And all these things certainly apply to those who while they were in the world were taught the arts of liberal studies. Moreover, how can it be right for us who are not permitted to speak even with guests, in whom Christ Himself is addressed and received, who are not allowed to open our mouths except to ask a question, and who do not dare at recreation to discuss even the Holy Scriptures, to burst in boldly upon the theatrical schools of the grammarians and to hold idle conversation with worldly men as if we were in the middle of a noisy market? I say all this against those monks who are involved in the trivialities of worldly learning so that I may show them how far they have

¹ Deut. *xxi*, 12-13.

strayed in their vanity from the straight path of righteousness.

CHAPTER TWELVE

Moreover, it is necessary that every brother who with a perfect heart renounces the world should unlearn whatever he knows that is harmful and, as far as he can, consign it to perpetual oblivion. He should be unable to argue the rival merits of cooks, or care for rich and splendid food; he must lose his skill in sophisticated or captious conversation, nor may he make use of rhetorical display by producing ringing declamations, or raise a smile from anyone by his witty or facetious remarks. Let him love fasting and cherish his lack of the needs of life; let him fly from the sight of men and bind himself by a severe silence; let him withdraw from all outward affairs and keep watch over his lips, so that they do not engage in idle conversation. Let him seek the secret places of his mind where he may strive with all his might to see the face of his Creator; let him long for the grace of tears and entreat his God earnestly for them in daily prayers. For the moisture of tears cleanses the soul from all stain and makes fertile the fields of the heart so that they may bring forth the seeds of virtue. Often the wretched soul sheds her fruit and the beauty of her leaves as if touched by the frost of winter; grace ebbs away and she is left abandoned and barren, stripped of the glory of her fallen flowers. But as soon as tears well forth, the gift of Him who sees in secret, the soul flourishes again, the ice of idle sloth is melted, and like a tree in spring, warmed by the south wind, she is clothed anew in the flower of her virtues.

The tears which come from God approach the judgment seat of the divine mercy with perfect confidence, and, obtaining at once what they ask, are assured of the certain forgiveness of our sins. Tears are the trustees in the making of peace between God and man, and true and wise masters in the doubtings of human ignorance. For if we are wondering whether or not we are pleasing to God, we shall never have greater certitude than when we pray with genuine tears. Whatever our souls resolve

upon them need never be doubted again. Tears wash away all taint of filth from the sinful woman;¹ they give to unclean hands the right to touch the Lord's head as well as His feet.² Because of his tears, the apostle who denied his Lord did not utterly perish as a result of his sin; indeed, he was given lordship over the other senators of the heavenly court. By the grace of tears David, after he had sunk into the hellish pit of adultery and murder, did not lose his kingdom and his life; on the contrary, he was given an inviolable promise that an heir would be born of his line who should possess the throne of his kingdom and all the kingdoms of the earth for ever. Because of his tears, almighty God added fifteen years to the life of the dying Hezekiah, and delivered him and the city of Jerusalem out of the hand of the king of Assyria. By reason of her tears, the divine mercy brought it about that Sara the daughter of Raguel was freed from the chains of shameful taunts, and God chose her in the person of His angel to be the wife of an honourable man. By her tears, Esther ensured that God would deliver the people of Israel from their common danger of death and that the sentence of hanging which he had prepared for another should be suffered by Haman himself. In the same way, her tears made it possible for Judith to cut off the head of Holofernes and to keep the pure flower of her chastity in the chamber of delight and seduction.

What shall I say of Cornelius the centurion, who through the grace of tears deserved to be visited by the apostle, and who at once, forsaking the errors of the Gentiles, was reborn in Christ to a new life? Need I remind you of Susannah, who when she fled to the protection of tears was at once rescued from the hands of those who were dragging her to her death? The sentence of death was laid instead upon her false accusers; thus, by the courage of a young man, innocent blood was spared. But if I were to tell you of all the graces conferred by tears, the day would be at an end before I had finished. It is tears which cleanse the soul from the stain of sin and strengthen the wandering mind in prayer. Tears bring forth joy from sad-

¹ Luke vii, 37-38.

² Matt. xxvi, 7.

ness; when they spring from the eyes of the flesh, they raise us up to the hope of eternal blessedness. So powerful is their voice in the ears of the Creator that nothing for which they ask can be refused; the Psalmist himself often used them as his means of approach, and that he clearly knew how efficacious they were is shown from his saying: 'Hear my prayer, O Lord and give ear unto my cry; hold not thy peace at my tears.'¹ He did not ask the Lord to behold with His eyes, but to hear with His ears the tears; this shows clearly that tears have voices. It is certain that when tears plead in the presence of the loving Judge, they are never at a loss, but claim mercy as if it were their right and rejoice with confidence at having obtained what they asked for. O tears of spiritual joy, better than honey or the honeycomb and sweeter than any nectar! You who renew the minds lifted up to God with the pleasant sweetness of a secret savour and water dry and wasting hearts at their very core with the stream of heavenly grace! For the sweetness and savour of earthly banquets delight the palates of those who eat them, yet do not penetrate to their inmost parts; but the savour of divine contemplation wholly fills us inwardly, and there quickens and sweetens us. Weeping eyes strike terror into the devil, who so fears the assaults of springing tears that he flees from them as if from hailstones falling from storm-clouds or a tempest of raging winds. For like a foaming torrent in spate which washes the river-bed clean of all its filth, a stream of flowing tears cleanses the soul of the weeper from the seeds of devilish cunning and all the pestilence of its foul vices.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

But this water has its source in fire; he who wishes to abound in these flowing streams must first kindle in the furnace of his heart the fire of divine love. I can explain this more clearly if I remind you of certain historical events recounted in the second book of Maccabees. The Scriptures say: 'When our fathers were led into Persia, the priests, who were then

¹ Ps. xxxix, 12.

worshippers of God, took fire from the altar and hid it secretly in a valley where there was a deep dry well and they put it in safety into the well, so that the place where they had hidden it was unknown to any. Many years later it pleased God that Nehemiah should be sent by the king of the Persians; he sent the kinsmen of those priests who had hidden the fire to search for it; and as they have told us, they found no fire, but thick water.¹ Of all this, what is important from the spiritual point of view is this: that in the first place fire was hidden in the deep dry well in the valley, and afterwards the searchers found not fire but thick water. The deep dry well may fittingly be said to represent the soul which searches for God with genuine and perfect intent; for such a soul is barren of the flowing delights of carnal pleasure and has dug deeply beneath the rubble of earthly desires; it is to be found in the valley of true humility. The sacrificial fire is put into this well when the flame of divine love springs up in the soul of one of the elect and the holy soul burns with heavenly desire. But the fire is turned into water, for from the fire of divine love spring the tears of remorse.

It is noteworthy that the water which was found was said to be not pure but thick. This thick water certainly symbolizes the tears of compunction, thickened without doubt by the rich fat of divine grace. The Prophet longed to be nourished by this fat when he said: 'My soul shall be satisfied as with marrow and fatness.'² And the same fatness was promised by another prophet, who said: 'Your soul shall delight itself in fatness.'³ Again, it was said: 'May the Lord remember all thy offerings and accept thy fat burnt-sacrifice.'⁴

Nor must we overlook the fact that those who hid away this fire simply put it in a safe place; they did not extinguish it. This is certainly because the fire of divine love, which we kindle on the altar of our heart so that we may, at the very beginning of our new life, offer a sweet sacrifice to God from the spices of our good works, must always burn secretly within

¹ 2 Macc. i, 19-20.

³ Isa. lv, 2.

² Ps. lxiii, 5.

⁴ Ps. xx, 3.

us; but it must not spread outwardly the flames of vainglory. It is made safe by the quieting of its own flames, but it is not robbed of the strength of its heat; and so it is not completely destroyed, but later the fire is miraculously turned into water. And this water of the tears of compunction not only cleanses us from the contagion of sin; it also commends our good works to God and makes them pleasing in His sight. Any sacrifice of good works becomes sweet in the eyes of the heavenly Judge if it is sprinkled with the tears of a contrite heart. So it will not come amiss if we add: 'And Nehemiah the priest commanded that the sacrifices which were laid there and the wood and all that was laid on the altar should be sprinkled with that water.'¹

As soon as we pour the water of compunction on the sacrifice of our deeds, a brightness shines upon our souls and makes light whatever was dark in them, or lay hidden in shadow. Then a certain ray of secret light reveals itself to us, and pours into all the hidden places of our soul a new clarity of sweet splendour. That is why, in the passage to which I refer, after it is stated 'Nehemiah the priest commanded that some of the water should be drawn and brought to him and sprinkled on the sacrifices which were laid there and the wood and all that was laid on the altar', the history goes on to say: 'This was done, and the time was at hand, and the sun, which had been in a cloud, shone forth once more; and a great fire was kindled, so that all were astonished.'²

We have already been told that water was found in the place of fire; now on the other hand we hear that through the sprinkling of water a great fire was kindled. So water is born of fire, and then in its turn fire is produced from water. This is because the grace of compunction springs from the fire of divine love, and in their turn tears of compunction increase the strength of heavenly desire. Each depends on the other, and each is responsible for the other, for tears of compunction flow from our love of God, and on the other hand, because of our tears, our souls burn more fiercely with love of God. The soul in which this mutual change and alternation takes place

¹ 2 Macc. i, 21.

² Ibid., 22.

will certainly be washed clean of the stains of its guilt. That is why the Scripture goes on to say: 'And Nehemiah called that place Nephthar, which means "purification".'¹ The place in which we offer sacrifice, in which water and fire carry out their mutual task, is the faithful soul. It too may fittingly be called 'purification', for at times it is consumed by the fire of heavenly love, and at others it is cleansed by the tears of a contrite heart, as if it were being washed in the waters of a second baptism.

Isaiah had a deep insight into these alternating changes and varieties of spiritual mutation; did he not say: 'Thy light shall arise in obscurity and thy darkness shall be as the noonday; and the Lord will give thee an everlasting rest, and fill thy soul with brightness, and shall deliver thy bones'?² That is the fire hidden in the well. See how this fire is turned into water: 'And thou shalt be as a watered garden and as a spring of water that never faileth.' Lastly, that you may know that this water is changed once more into fire, and that the fervour of divine love is increased by the grace of tears, he adds: 'Then shalt thou delight in the Lord, and I will lift thee up above the high places of the earth.'³

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

I feel that I cannot pass over in silence a certain thing which happened to me. When I had written as far as this, the Lord's Day intervened, and then certain matters came to light, and my concern for them further prevented me from going on with writing this. Then a certain boy named Sylvester who was concerned in the writing—let me give myself due credit; I did not dictate it to him, but when I had written it on tablets he would copy it onto parchment—was misled by so cunning a wile of our wicked enemy that he burst suddenly into tears, and could hardly check their floods by night or day, except at the hours of eating and sleeping; he refused to take any wine, and sustained himself on the barest modicum of food; but he slept as much as he possibly could. In the meantime, the devil

¹ Ibid.² Isa. lviii.³ Isa. lviii, 14.

put it into his head that he should seek the solitude of the upper hermitage, where he would rarely, if ever, see any of his fellow men; when we offered him the chance of becoming a true recluse, however, he replied that he did not at all want to become a completely enclosed hermit, but wished to live somewhere where he could be free and alone, and his comings and goings would not be watched over. Naturally, all the brothers were agreed in opposing this piece of stubbornness, and declared that this was probably nothing but a trick and a wile of Satan. But he was stubborn and wilful, believing in the authority of his flowing tears, and remained immovable in the desire by which he had been seized at the suggestion of our wicked foe. I think that our old enemy had stumbled upon a suitable instrument for misleading when he saw what Sylvester himself had copied down a little earlier in this very work—that when we are not sure whether or not we are pleasing to God, we will never have greater reassurance than when we pray with genuine tears. He did not heed what was written just before: that only those tears which come from God approach the judgement seat of the divine mercy, not those which are induced by the stratagems of the cunning waylayer.

In his negligence he overlooked the fact that I said: ‘All those who truly weep.’ For he weeps not truly, but falsely whose false tears are sent by the lying spirit. The blessed Pope Gregory wrote of a similar situation in his *Moralia*, when he said: ‘But the hand of remorse weighs very carefully these vices which the old enemy hides under appearances of virtue. He who truly grieves inwardly over his outward actions foresees clearly what should not be done. For if the force of compunction deeply affects us, all the clamour of evil suggestion is silenced at once. And if our heart is truly grieved within us, our vices will not be able to speak against us.’ You see that the great doctor, whose opinions here agree with my own foolish sayings, does not say ‘If our heart is grieved within us’, but ‘If our heart is truly grieved within us’. He clearly implies that the sorrow which pierces the soul which God has breathed upon is one thing, but that which produces, by the deceit of

our cunning adversary, feigned tears, which only seem to come from a sorrowing heart, is quite another; and that those tears which the spirit of lies and error simulates are one thing and quite different from those by which the Spirit of Truth washes away the filth and rust from our souls.

To return to the substance of my story—because he was given permission to live in a solitary place a short while ago, he was rash enough to cut himself off completely, and used to wander in vagabond fashion to other places; but he simply put his trust in his tears and utterly refused to take any notice of impartial advice; nor did he believe that it was possible that he should be in any way misled, since remorse daily flooded him with frequent streams of tears. What next? The egg which the viper was cherishing in the nest of his bosom hatched out at last its familiar offspring. For Sylvester begged to be allowed to look for a little while at a book which was very precious to me; and he cut out from its centre by stealth four quaternions, then, frightened by the pangs of conscience, and not wishing to be bound in chains, he stood in front of his cell, threatening to wound with his knife either himself or anyone else who came near him. It was then abundantly clear that the sort of tears he produced did not come from heavenly dew, but had gushed forth from the bilge-water of hell. I have told you all this, brethren, not to magnify the disgrace of our offending brother, but so that you may endeavour to be careful and vigilant even where good things are concerned.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

I should now like to give a short account of the various offices of the monastery, and to set forth the things which it is right that those who administer these offices should observe.

In the first place, therefore, O venerable abbot, do what you command others to do, practise what you preach, fulfil your own orders; your way of life must not be at variance with your words, there must be no distinction between what you do and what you say; the authority of the ruler must not teach

one thing while the behaviour of the monk proclaims another. Let your journeys outside the monastery be infrequent, so that you may always be able to cultivate and water the seed of the word which you have scattered. You must not, because of your continual running about, seem like a visitor in your own monastery; rather, your long staying and scrupulous seriousness must show you to be a dweller within it, a member of the household. Let the preacher be vouched for by his fasting and abstinence; the gullet of the banqueter must not assail the statements of the speaker. It is beyond question that the hand which carries food and drink to the mouth in moderation is a better teacher of sobriety than the tongue of the glutton is when it speaks. Besides, it is a forceful method of preaching, and one most effective in the souls of one's disciples, to urge others to eat but to keep a rigorous fast oneself while doing so.

Stretch the rod over those who offend in such a way that you keep the impulses of your own anger in strict restraint. Meanwhile, when you utter threats, when you strike the guilty with terror, turn your eyes upon yourself, consider the measure of human weakness, and carefully weigh the fact that you yourself could well be reprov'd, if anyone had the authority to do so; and do not be surprised if one of those subject to you chances to offend by not fulfilling all that you have commanded, when the weakness of human nature is such that the members of your own body cannot be completely subject to you in all things. Let me give you proof of what I say. Command your eyes not to be surprised by sloth, and your heart not to allow entrance to fantastic thoughts; declare chastity to the organs of reproduction, that they may not be roused by incentives of pleasure; preach temperance to the palate, so that it does not long for more delicious food; finally, command your whole body not to lay itself open to the onslaughts of disease. And when you have clearly proved that they demand your trust, but cannot altogether deserve it, do not be surprised that you are unable to discern a perfect obedience in all things in those who differ from you in character and behaviour. Certainly, if you consider all this intelli-

gently, you will bear the aberrations of brotherly frailty with equanimity.

If the patrimony of your house is enlarged, if you have an abundance of goods, if the house of God is enriched, do not claim it as a result of your own merits or endeavour, but ascribe it to Divine aid. For this reason, call to mind the time before you held office, and remember that none of these things came to you then. It is obvious that they were given not to you but to the Church of Christ, and that you would not have obtained them without Him.

Do not shudder at the idea of dining at the monastic table, nor take pleasure in private banquets; you must not think that those who share with you the common table of the altar are unfit to partake of bodily nourishment with you. Do not, therefore, let your absence give rise to the suspicion that you are dining privately, for this will mean that your good name will be troubled by pestilential murmurers and detractors. Nor should you care much about the quality of what is going to fill the privy; you should rather concern yourself with those things through which the love of the brethren may be united in Christ by the bonds of mutual charity.

Do not squander the goods of the monastery, nor seek to win general popularity for yourself at the expense of the common good. For if we believe that those who enrich churches gain remission of their sins, we must also certainly hold that those who impoverish and destroy them are bound by the heavy chains of sacrilege; and so the latter are liable to punishment for their sins in the same way that the others are found to have been absolved from the bonds of sin. Beware when you are surrounded by the obsequiousness of kinsmen, when you are sweetly smeared with the words of yes-men, lest this lordship and deep reverence should be so flattering to your soul that evilly-alluring thoughts will convince you that you are in fact worthy of all this (which God forbid). The happier a steward is in the size of what is committed to his care, the more wretched will he be when he has to render an account; the amount which he will owe when he comes to render

account will be proportional to the pleasure he took in the large amount that was committed to him. What St. Benedict says must inspire great fear: 'The abbot must give an account of all the souls committed to his charge, as well as of his own soul.'¹ And so let us consider how right it is that he who in the dreadful judgement will come to his own examination burdened with the reckonings of others should now be overawed by fear. But it is the nature of teachers to teach rather than to learn, so let these few words suffice; for those who are appointed to preach their own sermons may well weary of listening to mine.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

The prior of the monastery will carry out the duties of his priorship properly if he does not dispute the wishes of the abbot, and if he strengthens the souls of the brethren, as far as he is able, in a sincere love of the same abbot. Joseph, when he was overseer of his master's household, was unwilling to the last to attract to himself the desire of his master's wife, but taught her that she should remain steadfast in the love of her own husband. And that noble servant of Abraham, a mighty man, and of a deep humanity, counted all his service as nothing, that he might provide a wife for his lord in good faith; he forgot all his toil and his mighty journey; he concerned himself with everything that cropped up in the matter that he might fight on behalf of his lord alone. Just as the abbot must stir up his sons to the love of Christ by everything that he does, so the prior should endeavour to foster in the brethren a united love of their abbot, for fear that any jealousy should emerge (which God forbid). And so he must not be over-gentle with the faults of offenders in order to make the abbot seem cruel, but in the latter's absence the prior must so reprove all wrongdoing that the abbot on his return may rest in the joy of brethren who are filled with spiritual delight as if he were in the heart of a peaceful harbour.

¹ R. S. B. c. 2.

ON THE PERFECTION OF MONKS

He must therefore maintain a strict severity in correcting transgressors, nor must he allow the accustomed discipline of the rule to grow lukewarm in his house. He must be inflexible in his justice, so that the abbot may appear tender in his clemency. He must be insistent in his demands, so that the abbot may have the opportunity of making concessions out of fatherly love. Moses, the faithful servant, brought to us the commandments of naked justice; Christ, our truly loving Lord, tempered the harsh severity of the Law. But Aaron, who showed a sinful people that he was weak and pliant, joined with them in making idols for sacrilegious rites. The prior is like the veil which was hung before the ark of the covenant; he shields the abbot from all outward affairs. He meets with all the dust which rises from the highway of the world, to which he is continually exposed; the abbot, like the ark of the Lord, abides in the purity of his splendour. The prior is like Aaron in that he is the abbot's mouthpiece and speaks to the people; the abbot, like Moses, delights in divine conversations in all those things which relate to God. And so both of them together, joining together in unity of spirit, will, if it is possible, nourish for God such children that no posterity can succeed them in their right to enter into their heavenly inheritance.

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

The bell-ringer must realize that no one in the monastery should avoid forgetfulness more surely than he. If any hour of the office is not said at the proper time, either because it is too early or because it is too late, it is clear that the whole order of the hours to come will be upset. Because of this, he must not waste time in chatting, or holding long conversations with other people, nor must he ask questions about what is going on in the world. He must always pay the greatest attention to the charge committed to him, being watchful and careful, knowing that the turning globe does not pause in its course, and always considering the passage of the stars and the running out of fleeting time. And let him acquire the habit of reciting

the Psalter, if he wishes to have a daily method of telling the time; so that when he cannot see the brightness of the sun or the movement of the stars because of thick cloud, the number of psalms which he has got through will act as a sort of clock, enabling him to judge the time. It is certain that the custom of congregating in the church when bells are rung comes from a mystical tradition of the Old Law, for the Lord commanded Moses: 'Make thee two trumpets of silver that thou mayest use them for the calling of the assembly and for the journeying of the camps; and when they shall blow with them, all the assembly shall assemble themselves to thee at the door of the tabernacle of the congregation.'¹ Just as the people of Israel flocked to the tabernacle at the sound of the trumpets, so today the faithful hasten to the church when they hear the clamour of the bells.

Nor is there any disharmony in the fact that the trumpets are said to have been used for shifting camp, since camps are part of the preparation for battle. A little farther on, the text says: 'And if ye go to war in your land against the enemy that oppresseth you, then ye shall blow an alarm with the trumpets; and ye shall be remembered before the Lord your God, and ye shall be saved from your enemies.'² We march out to battle like a camp when we hasten to church to pray or sing the Office, if I may put it so. For there the princes of darkness wage deadly war against us, so that by distracting our minds with fantastic thoughts they may turn them from the words which our lips are uttering. And indeed what a splendid army it is, especially at night, when the brethren, aroused as if by the sound of the trumpet, form a wedge and marching like an ordered battle-column come forth inspired and ready for action in battle on the Lord's behalf. The wing of boys marches in front, followed by the band of the company of young men; last of all, following in their footsteps come the mature men, our chief strength in battle, who guard the rear of the whole army, lest any should fall or the hidden enemy attack.

A lantern is borne in the first rank of the army as a symbol

¹ Num. x, 2-3.

² Ibid., 9.

of the column of fire which went before the people of Israel in the desert. For indeed, just as the companies of Christ go forth to eat the heavenly manna, so did the legions of the true Israelites hasten to gain the land flowing with milk and honey. They go forth with sounding trumpets to the tabernacle of the Covenant to eat the banquet of the Heavenly Word, to offer to God the sacrifice of praise, and to fulfil the promises of goodwill. That is why the Scriptures go on to say: 'Also in the day of your gladness, and in your solemn days and in the beginning of your months, ye shall blow with the trumpets over your burnt-offerings and over the sacrifices of your peace-offerings; that they may be to you for a memorial of your God.'¹ From these and similar words let the bell-ringer take careful note as to how watchful and careful it behoves him to be in the office which has been assigned to him; lest through his carelessness he should bring disorder to so great a work and to the rules of his order.

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

The refectory reader must carefully consider how clearly and plainly and intelligibly he ought to read; for he provides the food of the soul at the same time as the brethren are receiving refreshment for the body. Others offer bodily food, which will soon be turned into rottenness; he gives the word of God, which will not pass away even though heaven and earth should pass away. He must therefore read in such a way that while the flesh is fed with its gifts the soul may be nourished with heavenly banquets.

Reading is for the benefit of the hearer rather than of the reader; so the reader must not strive to make others talk of his own merits; rather, he must concern himself with the edification of others. He must not heed what is said about the reader, but what may be understood of the reading. Those who eat must be reminded that their meal should be so ruled by temperance that the noise of grinding jaws does not block up the channels to the ears. The hand must be restrained, and act as

¹ Num. x, 10.

mediator between mouth and table, and hold itself in check with the bridle of severity, so that the starving soul is not forced to abstain from divine nourishment while the throat is fed with earthly food.

CHAPTER NINETEEN

The cellarer, who has been appointed as a sort of father to the monastery, must perform the task committed to him with such skill in economic management that he carefully checks his openhandedness, and at the same time avoids being close-fisted; he must be frugal in generosity and generous in frugality. Above all, he must beware lest he mistake niggardliness for frugality and prodigality for generosity. For vice often cloaks itself under the appearance of virtue, and the more any evil has the appearance of good, the more difficult it is to reform. The good administrator will minister to the needs of the body in such a way that he also shows concern for the health of the soul; by his frugality he will encourage temperance, while by his generosity he will ensure that the evil of murmuring does not arise. For often, as a most wise man has said, liberality destroys liberality; that is to say, goods are carelessly lavished on those who have no need of them, so that afterwards there is nothing left to give to those who, being truly in need, ought to be supplied.

He must therefore refuse to give more than is necessary to our own brethren, in order that he may have something left over from which to give alms to those not of our household. Nehemiah, so that he might receive at his own table those that came to him from the heathen that were about him, would have thought it shame to spare his flocks; and he ordered the demands upon his own income in such a way that he could perform works of charity to strangers. Tobias, when he was so poor that his wife had to work as a weaver, divided the little that he had so that he might give some comfort to his fellow-captives. And so, himself a pilgrim, he did not allow loving-kindness to be a stranger to him, and although poor in pos-

sessions, he did not lack the riches of a splendid charity. When Abigail carried away part of a splendid banquet she turned the sword of David, hastening to avenge an insult, away from the throat of her husband; and so she did well to take food from the mouths of her own household, so that by giving it to strangers she might save their lives. Paul commands that on the first day of each week each man should set something aside, so that by the kindness of the Corinthians it may be sent to the needy saints at Jerusalem. We must, therefore, supply the brethren with the daily necessities of life in such a way that we remember, if our goods are sufficient, to succour strangers in their need. The cellarer must be the steward of the Church, not a distinguisher of persons but one who considers weaknesses; not a seeker after favour but a supporter of others in their helplessness; he must make just distributions of fair portions to the needy, whom a diversity of frailty distinguishes, having a regard for the proper stewardship of his office. In this way, there will be no breeding-ground for scandal; that is, if he bestows on each man what he needs and not what he wishes.

CHAPTER TWENTY

And now, since we are embracing the whole body of this holy monastery in the outstretched arms of brotherly love, we have decided to make a distinction between the different age-groups, and to give to each such advice as seems most fitting. I will begin with those who are just starting out: you must learn, who are yet boys, that you are at the pliant age; you are still delicate because of the frailty of your bodies, and also may be bent by different sorts of behaviour. The farther you are from being fully-grown branches, as Pythagoras says, the easier it is either to guide you to the right or to deflect you down the left-hand slope. But if the clay suffers any injury in the potter's hands, this, if it is not corrected at once, will afterwards become as hard as stone, nor can it be remedied. A twig springing straight from the root which becomes bent for any reason will never be made straight again if it remains bent for

any length of time, and since it is obviously useless as a spear-shaft will be used as food for the greedy flames.

And so beware, lest any vice should increase with the growth of your body, lest the knots of any perversity should harden within you; rather, be vessels of honour and not of reproach, ready for any good work in the house of the Lord. If you desire to shine with the uprightness of manhood, and to abound in virtue without wearying yourselves with labour (which is not possible for others), take up at once the weapons of continence, and fight with all your strength against the violent temptations of the flesh. At this, the very beginning of your apprenticeship, assure yourselves of certain victory with God on your side; boldly wage implacable war on the hostile spirits, carrying before you the standard of the Cross. Tread your pride underfoot, crush envy, curb your tongue with a strict silence, let meditation on the Scriptures quench the desires of the palate; your tongue must not utter detraction, nor give countenance to it by listening to it. Solomon says: 'Meddle not with detractors; for their calamity shall arise suddenly, and who knoweth the ruin of them both?'¹ The ruin, that is to say, of him who detracts, and of him who listens to the detractor. It is not, however, detraction to reveal a brother's fault to him whose duty it is to correct it.

It is easy to see that this is particularly true of boys, since they cannot be suspected of the desire to harm or to denounce. Joseph in his father's presence accused his brethren of great wickedness; yet although this meant that he incurred their hatred, the final consequence was that he gained lordship over them. Jonathan and Ahimaaz, hidden near a well in En-Rogel, sent a messenger to King David, telling him to flee swiftly from Absalom; and so Zadok and Abiathar did through their sons what they could not do themselves. Often the young men will uncover a fault which the older and wiser can then reform for the good of all. Do not, however, now that you are growing up, wrongly debate the merits of your superiors; do not concern yourselves with the path which they follow, but

¹ Prov. xxiv, 21-22.

remember whose authority they represent, and be humbly subject to them in Christ. For, as St. Paul says: 'We have had fathers of our flesh who corrected us, and we gave them reverence: shall we not much rather be in subjection to the fathers of the spirit, and live?'¹ Samuel learned from Heli what to reply to the Lord when He called him; and because he was subject in all humility to the wicked priest, he heard the words of divine revelation. When a spirit troubled proud Saul, David did not refuse to serve him by playing his harp.²

In order that you may be able to quench the flames of desire, shun the enticements of the palate which kindle those flames and are like oakum, naphtha, pitch and fire-darts. For that fourth one who appeared among the young men in the fiery furnace will bring to you the consolation of His spirit, like a rain-bearing wind. And so in all things you must lay aside the playthings of childhood, and dedicate to the Lord the beginning of your noviciate through the native qualities of your noble state. Follow Him as a leader among the struggles against temptation; seek Him as your protector in the peaceful days of good fortune. Surrounded, therefore, by the invincible spears of the virtues, cry together to Christ your champion; 'Plead my cause, O Lord, with them that strive with me: fight against them that fight against me. Take hold of shield and buckler, and stand up for mine help.'³ When you are brought to perfect manhood, to the measure of the stature of His fullness, He will give you the victory by His own strength. He will cause you to place your triumphant feet on the necks of your enemies. I would advise you also to read the letter which I sent to my kinsman Marinus.

CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

As for you young men, you growing youths, you have the more need of the mighty aid of exhortation, since you endure harsher struggles with the lusts of the flesh. For it is upon you that all the forces of the enemy charge in direct assault, upon

¹ Heb. xii, 9.² 1 Sam. xvi.³ Ps. xxxv, 1-2.

you that the chief weight of the war presses. You are assailed by thick showers of all kinds of darts; the wicked spirits are gathered against you with all the vices of the flesh, and they hurl down violent storms upon you. Wars rage in your very bones, and the furnace of your body belches forth balls of fire like restless Vesuvius or fiery Etna. Because of this, it is necessary that the more bitterly your self-mastery is assailed, the more strongly you must persevere. Those who are struck by javelins while they brandish their own spears, and who are wounded when they desire to wound others will be in serious difficulties. For we must either put our enemies to flight or flee ourselves; either turn our backs or drive our enemies before us. In this battle we must either conquer or be overthrown; he who does not win a glorious victory will suffer a shameful defeat. There is always the danger that when the enemy army is surrounded, it will be strengthened by a troop of rebellious citizens, or that while the army is drawn up to join in battle the entrance to the camp will be opened up by treacherous inhabitants. For the vices which dwell within us join with our tempters in tempting us, and increase the power of the wicked demons.

Wherefore, dearly beloved, take up the weapons of temperance, humility, patience, obedience, chastity, charity and all the other virtues and fight, not for towns and fields, not for sons or wives, but for your very souls, which are more important than any love or friendship. Above all, so that your new manhood may be strengthened, you must fast and pray; so that fasting may subdue the vigour of the flesh and prayer raise your soul up to God. But do not forget the fact that those who fast indiscriminately fail to gather the fruit of their fasting; whatever they abstain from on one day, they eat on another, satisfying their hunger as they please. And so it comes about that the day of fasting wages war against the next day, and before today's meals have been digested, our empty stomachs are eating the banquet prepared for tomorrow; and when we long for something different from and richer than the common fare, all the remedies of the apothecary will need to be em-

ployed, not without inconvenience to the servants. He may therefore be said to fast well who is content with the common fare on the days when he eats; for if he eats the same food as those who eat daily, he will not exceed the measure of what they eat. Neither, however, must you, in making too much of fasting, forsake obedience, which is the golden highway to Heaven.

Now I will tell you something which I did not hear at second hand, but saw with my own eyes. There was a certain monk at Pomposa named Raimbald, the brother of that most venerable Peter who is now abbot of Vincentia. He was in the habit of subduing his young body with frequent fasts, and at the very beginning showed signs in many ways of his truly remarkable gifts. He was given the task of ministering to a certain German anchorite who had had his eyes put out and his right hand cut off, and lived a laborious life near the church. Now it was a rule of the monastery that no cloister-monk should speak when he was outside the house. On one occasion when Raimbald complained bitterly in chapter that he could not possibly instruct inexperienced boys to wash the clothes of the servant of God or tell them what food to prepare for him by means of signs, declaring and maintaining that unless he broke silence he could hardly obey his orders, that holy man Abbot Guido vehemently opposed him, refusing to absolve him from the duty of silence, and remained unmoved in the judgment he had already given; at last, after a good deal of talk, it came to this, that Raimbald should be ordered to relinquish this task and to keep quiet. But how swift is the sternness of divine retribution! Before half a day had elapsed Raimbald declared in tears that he had been struck in the throat with dreadful agony by a hand from above. What then? If I am not mistaken, he died three days afterwards, having made satisfaction and received the blessing of his holy father.

We have told you this about one of our own number, dearly beloved, that you may remember that holy obedience must never be neglected for the sake of any good work or act of devotion. Be very careful also in the battle against your

temptations, always watchful, always wary, so that the time of temptation may pass, and you may not accomplish in action what was suggested to you in thought. For often in worldly battles that may occur in an instant which no length of time, however great, can afterwards hope to alter. On the other hand, he who is on his guard against a single wounding stroke may in that brief moment win greater length of life. You know what I am talking about: often a man will slip suddenly into the whirlpool of a sin which he must of necessity weep for as long as he lives. Therefore in every moment of temptation we must watch with great shrewdness, for fear that that temptation should achieve its end; but if a wicked deed is put off for a short space of time, we may escape it altogether; in avoiding the sudden blow, we enable ourselves afterwards to live a long life in safety.

CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

Those who are but newly come to the order of religion must be reminded that they should first of all take up the struggle against greed; so that when the belly is forced to observe the laws of temperance the fires of lust will as a result be checked even in those parts which lie beneath the belly. The tongue must be restrained from idle chatter, and indeed from too much talking of any kind with the brethren or anyone else; so that the less it has been worn out by the interchanges and circumlocutions of empty wordiness, the more free it may be to occupy itself with prayer and the praise of God. Let your eye wear out the floor with its ceaseless looking, and your soul be raised on the scaffold of burning desire to heaven. Let each substance consider its origin, so that while the flesh is convinced that it is itself no more than the dust which it beholds, the soul, raised up to that which it has lost, may long for it with eager and unfailing desire. Let your poverty and need cause you to favour rough and ragged clothing; in the cold of winter wear poor and despised garments. Long-deferred and quickly-descending sleep will soften your hard bed. The soft-

ness of his couch means little to the man who is thinking only of the period of peace which is granted to him; nor does he who desires, like Macarius, to spend watchful nights intent in prayer long, like Sardanapalus, to float on a bed of feathers. Keep away from public places; flee from the sight of men. Search for unfrequented places, go into hidden and remote retreats. For secret prayers storm heaven, and carry off forgiveness when they are poured forth often in the shadows by the light of heaven.

Do not reply to offered insults by being insulting in your turn; but let the moderation of your reply sweeten the bitterness of your taunter; and if you cannot easily do this, let your angry tongue be curbed by a strict silence, for fear a dangerous quarrel should arise. A ship under full sail is often sunk by the raging winds; but if her sail-yard is lowered, all the force of the gale batters her in vain. And so the shafts of the reviler will not find their mark if the soul of the reviled abases itself in humility. The novice must often attempt great things, so that lesser ones may be made easy by comparison.

What I am saying at such length is this: Drink muddy or lukewarm water often so that, spurning the desire for wine, you may think that clear cold water is enough for you. Often serve a bran-loaf, so that you may have an appetite for ordinary bread, and not look for loaves made with fine wheaten flour. A man who has lain on a couch of cushions will not be content with a patchwork quilt; but he will be satisfied with a litter of straw in any place if he has been wearing out the bare floor with his flanks. He who is made sick by oil after he has eaten meat should live on salt vegetables for some time, so that his throat may know the sweetness of a sober drink. He who takes pleasure in an unaccustomed journey on horseback should confine himself within the narrow walls of his cell, and then the cloisters of the monastery will seem like a market-place to him. A man may, if he is used to sable and ermine, scorn sheep's wool; but if he is clothed in rags, it is a matter of indifference to him whether he be kept warm by exotic or homely skins. Moses fasted on the mountain for twice forty days from all

food and drink, so that he might be content with manna alone, and not desire to sit by the fleshpots with the other Israelites. The sons of the prophets did not refuse to cut up bitter apples for their pot, so that they might not scorn any vegetable. When Daniel was forced to live among the fierce and gaping jaws of the lions, he learned never to fear again the wiles of wicked men. When Nebuchadnezzar suffered the senselessness of a brute beast, when he wandered through thick woods and forest pastures like a wild animal, he was changed so that he should not take pride in the dignity of his royal power. When David was cast down from the glory of his royal throne by his own son, he learned not to avenge himself on Shimei the stranger. We must certainly believe that after Isaiah had gone naked and barefoot for three years, he no longer felt the need for soft or superfluous garments.

Whoever wishes, therefore, to make any task or labour easy for himself must go forth boldly and try a higher and more difficult thing; so that harshness may lighten harshness, and nettles may be made bearable, so to speak, in comparison with rough and thorny brambles. I do not wish to imply that you should not begin with the lesser things; what I mean is that when you attempt more difficult things, these lesser ones will be made light by comparison. The novice must be careful about this, when in striving after things hard to attain he enters the narrow way; when he begins to be tried beyond his strength he should return at once to easier ways. If a needle is driven violently into a hard substance, it will break unless it is drawn out carefully; but if a shoemaker thrusts it in and out with his cobbler's skill, it will pierce easily through any solid substance which it encounters. The same is true of us at the beginning of our new way of life: if we strive for a time and then relax, if we alternate between pressing forward through harsh and difficult ways and resting by sparing ourselves, we will soon find that a road will open which will pass easily through all obstacles.

CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE

I must not overlook you holy old men, who have the more need of caution in battle in that the end of your striving is near at hand. For it follows that if you should be defeated now, you will be unable to regain the glory of your lost victory. Now, therefore, the fervent must be kindled to mighty deeds; the old man must take to himself the strength of youth in order to vanquish the barbarous vices. Now indeed your feet are on the threshold of the city; now you are drawing near, through the central gates, to the repose of a blessed peace.

Renounce idleness then, and lay aside sloth; do not let the remembrance of the long labours you have accomplished hold you back, when the reward offered draws you on to undergo new hardships which lie before your eyes. The deeper a searcher for gold has dug into the vein in the earth, the more eagerly and firmly does he gird himself up in order to finish the rest of his work. The work he has done does not drain his strength as much as the hope of the treasure which is coming nearer and nearer impels him to his endeavours in digging up the soil. He who is hastening to a wedding-feast as a groomsman has no reason to long for an early breakfast beforehand. For behold! the beeves and fatlings of the gospel are killed, and all things are ready. The voice of the herald is heard: 'Come to the wedding.' Why should anyone want to anticipate his pleasures who is soon going to feast on wedding dishes? Why should he want to belch before he has sat down? Why should he fill himself with swine's husks who is hastening towards the food of angels? Why should he not hold back from a starved satiety of his pleasures now, when the highest and most perfect happiness of heavenly glory awaits him? Why should he not now curb his tongue and refrain from gossip and idle talk who is looking forward to an eternal and most intimate contemplation of the very Word by whom all things were made? Why should he not for the sake of austerity avoid the company of his fellows, when he is moving towards the court of the everlasting emperor and the heavenly senators? Why should

he shudder at being covered with rough garments, who is to be clothed in the robe of immortality?

And so do not be ashamed to abstain from all the pleasures of the world for the sake of abounding in the riches of the delights of heaven; we do this so that our souls may not cleave to created things but may long even more for the embrace of the Creator. For he who approaches the threshold of the royal palace after a long journey would be considered insane if he was so concerned with the buildings that he did not yearn to see the king's face. Do not let the weakness of an exhausted body destroy your hope of mighty deeds; for if you have the Spirit in your heart he will give you inward strength and power. Thus Caleb, because he had zealously kept the Lord's commandments said, still vigorous with the strength of his youth: 'I am this day four score and five years old. As yet I am as strong this day as I was in the day that Moses sent me: as my strength was then, even so is my strength now, for war, both to go out and to come in.'¹ That is to say, both in opposing vice and in the increasing of good works in the paths of holiness. And we read in Deuteronomy: 'Moses was an hundred and twenty years old when he died: his eye was not dim, nor his natural force abated.'² And Moses himself said in blessing Asher: 'Thy shoes shall be iron and brass: and as thy days, so shall thy strength be.'³

And so, dearly beloved, do not take advantage of the concessions made to you by laying down the weapons of fasting and vigils as if your vices were dead; do not indulge in enticing pleasures as if you were already safe, while you are still running in the contest. For old men are used to fasting, and although their frailty longs for food, yet the habitual inclination of their nature is in harmony with fasting and temperance. Barzillai the Gileadite was invited to a feast: 'Come,' said King David, 'and I will feed thee with me in Jerusalem.' But he pleaded the dullness of age, and excused himself from the delights of the royal banquet: 'Can I distinguish between sweet and bitter? Can thy servant taste what I eat or what I drink? Can I hear

¹ Joshua xiv, 10-11.

² Deut. xxxiv, 7.

³ Ibid., xxxiii, 25.

any more the voice of singing men and singing women?"¹ From this we can see how peaceful and of what excellent morals that old man was. For why should he not, if necessary, be content with poverty in familiar things who scorns the dishes of the king's table to which he was invited? Why should he take pleasure in producing idle or laughter-provoking words whose chaste ears disdain to listen to the songs of strangers? How could a man who found no pleasure even there where psalms were sometimes sung find any peace where the playing and dancing of actors resounds?

I must not forget to tell you that there are some old men who even after they have become monks are so busy with ancient lamentation that they harm themselves and seem crazy to their hearers. Sometimes they piece together the fragments of past events; sometimes they talk of the decrees of dead kings or their conquests, and they spend the whole day in the vain recital of old wives' tales. So it happens that the tongue which God gave them, instead of being employed in salutary prayer, makes itself ridiculous by the repetition of idle and superstitious stories; while they appease the hunger of their tongues with noxious feasts of story-telling, they fail to restrain their bellies under the proper control of temperance, for wordiness is ever the enemy of fasting.

There is an old monk of ours in the monastery of Sitria, named Mainard; when he was still a soldier and I was urging him to become a monk he, being as yet talkative and snappish, boldly gave me a quarrelsome answer: 'Look,' he said, 'I can scarcely exist even now, when the daily assiduity of my serving-maids cherishes me and ministers to me in all things; how, then, should I be able to take up the way of a religious rule who as it is can scarcely stay on my feet even without the burden of any discipline?' A short time after, however, he became a monk, by whose persuasion I do not know; and old and ill as he was, he embarked on his new life with such fervour that the old and mature and wise men regarded him as a miracle, while the deceitful and wanton young men of the

¹ 2 Sam. xix, 35.

monastery held him in scorn. They with all their tearing at him with evil speaking and gnawing at him with biting words could not so turn him away from the austere life he had determined upon that he failed to recite the Psalter four times daily, and likewise to fast from all food and drink four days in the week, summer and winter alike. And he retained another of his earlier customs: each month was so disposed that in the first week he ate nothing at all except on the Lord's Day and on Thursday. Unless I am mistaken, he has now been wearing the habit of holy religion for twelve years, and has spent all that time in the monastery.

There is also another of our brethren, Leo of Prezia, who is enclosed within the confines of a cell; we have mentioned him briefly in some of our other writings. He is so old that he has seen the deaths of those who were born after him and is regarded as an old man by those who have grown old in his lifetime. Despite the sickness of so exhausted and trembling a body, he never drinks wine except on two or at the most three great feast-days in the year. He never eats before the ninth hour except on the Lord's Day; on two days of the week (this is when he is living less strictly) he will not eat more than one dish. He arranges the order of his prayers in this way: every day, both in summer and in winter, he recites the Psalter with its canticles and litanies before the night office of the Church, between the first light of dawn and the sixth hour he sings the Psalter with nine lessons for the departed; finally, towards evening he closes the day with a third recitation of the Psalter and the *Gloria*.

Moreover, he has this gift, which I have never found in any other man, however perfect; that when he is reciting the psalms no other thought intrudes; so great is the purity of his heart that he does not have to trouble to resist distraction; his mind never thinks of anything which it not in harmony with the psalms his lips are reciting. And it is very remarkable that his eyes are never weighed down with the weariness of spiritual sloth. I must add that although he cannot see men's faces, because of the blindness of old age, yet he can

see and read letters, and reads through the Psalter twice daily.

Another astonishing thing is that when he is in his cell, where the light is dim, he can read every letter that is written; when he comes outside where it is easier to see, he cannot recognize their outlines. This he has often admitted to me after I had carefully questioned him. He does not suffer from the strivings of the flesh, nor does he need to labour against any distraction of the mind, even for a moment. Crucified as he is to this world, he scarcely perceives any human thing; all unleavened and wholly sincere, he lives, I declare, the life of an angel.

See, dearly beloved, I have given you two examples of the many at hand, one from the cenobitic and the other from the solitary life. From them you may clearly learn that where the fire of a fervent spirit has been kindled, the desire for good works does not grow dim in our old age; but in the same way that a lively spirit sends forth the serpent who is borne upon his ribs, not his feet, to run, so the love of God urges our aged limbs onwards through the desire for spiritual combat. For we have not yet a continuing city, but we seek one to come,¹ and so we must not hope for rest in any period of our life here: on the high seas of this world the just must struggle on where the impious may take their rest. This difference is symbolized by the raven and the dove which were sent forth from the ark; the raven perched on drowned bodies, and did not return to the safety of the ark; but the dove returned, for she found no place where her foot could rest. Here indeed where wicked men satisfy themselves with the pleasures of the flesh, holy men can nowhere find a place of rest for their desire. This is why he who is discovered to have sinned must, according to the law, receive forty stripes. For the number forty mystically contains that entire period of time during which the Church, scattered throughout the four quarters of the world, lived under the law of the Decalogue. We sinners receive forty stripes if while we are in this life we are chastised by the rod of penitence. Now every sinner, be he old or young, must be

¹ Heb. xiii, 14.

bruised in this world so that he may be found cleansed from guilt in the day of judgement; for there no chastisement can afflict those who throughout their life in the world, whatever their age or rank, were stricken by the discipline of perfect penitence.

CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR

But now, dearly-beloved brethren, I speak to every one of you; I entreat you by the name of Christ, in which every knee shall bow. Remain steadfast in brotherly love; unite together in the zeal of your mutual affection against the wiles of our ancient enemy. Let the whole structure of your holy way of life be raised on the foundations of charity; let the whole edifice which you are building from the living stones of virtue be cemented by the mortar of a genuine love. The voice of God commanded that the ark which was to hold eight souls during the deluge should be smeared with pitch within and without, so that she should be outwardly soothed by brotherly sweetness and inwardly united in the truth of mutual love. Whoever loves inwardly, but is outwardly at variance with his brethren because of the unsuitable harshness of his behaviour has the inner lining of pitch but not the outer. He on the other hand who to all outward appearances shows himself kindly and feigns friendship but does not possess the reality of friendship in his inmost heart is damnably full of holes inside, while outwardly he is united by the pretence of the pitch he has smeared. Neither of them shall be saved from shipwreck in the deluge, since neither is protected by a double lining of pitch as the Lord commanded.

But he who is outwardly kindly and also keeps his inward love, who shows forth the fruit of kindliness as well as the branches of the word, and who sends down deep roots within, since he loves from the bottom of his heart, such a man is smeared with pitch both within and without, because he is joined to his neighbours by a double bond of charity. Now it was commanded in the first place that the ark should be

made of smooth wood, and then that it should be smeared with pitch; we have already written above how you should smooth and polish your wood with the axe of penance and discipline; now in logical consequence we urge you to apply pitch to the finished structure. Indeed, when the manners of men are rough and harsh, it is useless to apply the bond of charity to them; for they soon spring apart from each other when they do not observe a balanced agreement of polite behaviour.

You must therefore be smoothed by the discipline of spiritual labour and lined by the harmony of brotherly love. This union cannot be one of perfect agreement unless the ark is finished with a cubit; that is to say, unless one man is set over the rest as Christ's vicar. Unity brings about agreement among many men; it causes the wills of different men to be in accord in the bonds of charity and the unanimity of a common spirit.

Therefore, dearly beloved, if you desire to be at one with each other in the love of Christ, be more intent in your obedience in humbleness of heart to him who is set above you in Christ's place. Let there be no babbling Shem among you to reveal the shameful nakedness of his father and to talk of the abominableness of his father's sin. For in the midst of his brethren he was not numbered among the first-fruits of the Israelites, nor does he merit a place in the fullness of the nations. He who, despising the shepherd, seeks a hireling, who listens to the voices of strangers, who plays with the hammers of discord in the furnace of hatred and who divided the kingdom of Israel by sowing the seed of schism will have no place there. 'We have no part in David,' he says, 'neither have we inheritance in the son of Jesse.'¹ As long as bees make honey together they remain under a single leader. And cranes, too, as long as they stay in line, and follow their leader never lose their orderly course. As soon as Rome was built, it became impossible for her to have two brothers as kings; and so the first walls of the rising structure were dedicated by fratricide. Jacob and Esau, when they were in the womb of Rebecca and

¹ 2 Sam. xx, 1.

had no clothing but their mother's belly, fought as if they were already dressed in armour.

Therefore the abbot must embrace and cherish the brethren as if they were his sons; in the same way, they must defer to him as if he were their father. You know what Cicero said: 'Why should I treat you as an emperor when you do not treat me as a senator?'¹ It is not that the more spiritual disciples are to be reproached with this; but we wish that the weaker brethren should be deprived of the opportunity to complain. And so he should love all the brethren, so that he may of right be loved by them in return. In this way therefore the shepherd and the sheep, the general and the soldiers, should be joined together in the single-minded practice of virtue; so that love, which is God, may rule them in undivided unity. See, beloved fathers and lords, I halt my pen in its course here for a purpose; for I know that what I have written is crude and clumsy. Nevertheless, that which is despised because it lacks the savour of salt may be commended for its brevity. And so I beseech you who sometime eat pulse after you have partaken of sea-delicacies that you will not scorn to glance at this scrap of parchment after reading the Sacred Writings.

¹ Cicero, *De Orat.* II, in proem.

THE FIFTY-EIGHTH TREATISE OF
ST. PETER DAMIAN

Concerning True Happiness and Wisdom

Peter the sinful monk sends greetings to the most prudent Boniface, in the indissoluble bond of their true love.

I know very well, brother, that when this letter of mine falls into the hands of your worldly acquaintances, it will be scanned diligently to see whether it shines with eloquence; they will look to see whether it has been set forth in logical order, whether it gleams with the rich colours of rhetorical art, whether the opinions it contains are elaborated by arguments of dialectical subtlety; they will ask whether I use categorical or hypothetical syllogisms to construct my propositions by means of irrefutable adductions.

CHAPTER ONE

But those who live by the spirit of God despise these ornamental frivolities as things utterly vain and worthless, and, as the Apostle says, count them but as dung.¹ And Paul bears witness that he himself did not speak to his disciples with wisdom of words, lest the cross of Christ should be made of no effect.² What splendid and fruitful and honourable eloquence is that which, while it puffs up its proud author with the wind of vainglory, makes of no effect the cross of Christ, which is the world's salvation!

And so, dearly beloved, do not look to find in my letters the enticing salt savour of mordant wit or the charm of smooth sophistication; be content with that sheeplike simplicity which

¹ Phil. iii, 8.

² 1 Cor. i, 17.

leads to God; and shun the cunning of the serpent, which instils a deadly poison. The Scriptures say: 'Now the serpent was more subtle than any beast of the field.'¹ And the Lord, who set an irreconcilable enmity between the seed of the woman and that of the serpent, called Himself a shepherd of sheep, not of serpents; He did not say 'My serpents' but 'My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and I give unto them eternal life.'² And yet the wise men of this world hold in scorn the simplicity of the servants of God. This is why Moses says: 'The Egyptians might not eat bread with the Hebrews; for that is an abomination unto the Egyptians.'³ He gives the reason for this elsewhere, when he says 'Every shepherd is an abomination unto the Egyptians.'⁴ And Truth Himself has said that the children of this world are wiser in their generation than the children of light.⁵ That is why they love the cunning of the serpent and despise the purity and simplicity of the sheep. Yet the Lord said to Peter: 'If you love Me, feed My sheep, feed My lambs.'⁶ Did He say 'Feed my foxlings, feed my dragons'?

Concerning all this I would say to you, dearly beloved, that you should beware of the dreadful subtlety of the serpent. Your holy wisdom should tread the middle way between folly and cunning. This is what James meant when he dismissed the wisdom of the serpent, saying: 'This wisdom descendeth not from above, but is earthly, sensual, devilish.'⁷ A little later he tells us of that kind of wisdom which we should possess: 'The wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle and easy to be entreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy.'⁸ Paul also tells us not to think more highly than we ought, but to think soberly.⁹ Isaias says of unbridled wisdom: 'The wisdom of their wise men shall perish, and the understanding of their prudent men shall be hid. Woe unto them that seek deep to hide their counsel from the Lord; whose works are in the dark and they say: Who

¹ Gen. iii, 1.

⁴ Gen. xlvii, 34.

⁷ Jas. iii, 15.

² John x, 27-28.

⁵ Luke xvi, 8.

⁸ Ibid., 17.

³ Gen. xliii, 32.

⁶ John xxi, 15-18.

⁹ Rom. xii, 3.

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seeth us, and who knoweth us?' The prophet mocks at such wisdom: 'Where is the scribe? Where is the lawyer? Where is the teacher of the children? You shall not see an unwise people, a people of deep speech, so that you cannot understand the discourse of their tongue, in which there is no wisdom.'¹

CHAPTER TWO

The Apostle distinguishes clearly the great difference between worldly prudence and spiritual wisdom in another place, when he says: 'For after that in the wisdom of God the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe.'² And again: 'The carnal mind is the enemy of God; for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be.'³ This is why as we are told in the book of Genesis, the five kings who did not wish to submit to Chedorlaomor were overcome by four kings. This took place in the vale of Siddim, which is now the salt sea. The four kings represent those four virtues which Holy Scripture calls the principal virtues; the five kings symbolize the senses of the body, and thereby outward knowledge. And just as the former, those virtues which I have mentioned, spring from their mother-source, the fountain-head of reason, so the latter remain in the valley of salt which is the vanity of earthly wisdom, where they are overthrown by their enemies; for it is fitting that in our souls the wisdom of the spirit should have the victory and the cunning of fleshly knowledge should perish. We read of David that 'he gat himself a name when he returned from smiting of the Syrians in the valley of salt, twelve thousand being slain.'⁴ And Christ, our true David, mighty in strength and splendid to behold, scattered twelve thousand men in the valley of salt, for through His apostles He triumphed over the salt, nay, the false witness of this world. He had twelve warriors for his spiritual battle, and through each of them must have slain a thousand men when he converted the fool-

¹ Isa. xxxiii, 18-19.

³ Rom. viii, 7.

² 1 Cor. i, 21.

⁴ 2 Sam. viii, 13.

ishly wise from the folly of their vain knowledge. One of these warriors said to the Corinthians: 'Though we walk in the flesh we do not war according to the flesh; for the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God for the pulling down of strongholds, casting down imaginations and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ.'¹

CHAPTER THREE

Indeed, just as heavenly wisdom makes spiritually-minded and lawful sons of the Church, so earthly prudence makes them carnal-minded and bastards. Of these, Baruch says: 'And the sons of Agar, who sought out diligently that wisdom which is of this world, the merchants of Merrha and Theman, the spinners of tales and seekers of knowledge, knew not the way of wisdom, nor did they remember her paths.'² Those who desire to pursue worldly knowledge and who despise the wisdom of the spirit are sons of Agar, not of Sarah; and, being bastards, are to be judged by the law of Ishmael, not that of Israel. And, since the name Agar means 'stranger', they are not the children of wisdom, but strangers and pilgrims, but not of the number of those to whom the Apostle says: 'Now therefore ye are no more strangers and pilgrims, but fellow-citizens with the saints, and of the household of God.'³ Do you too, dearly beloved (if I may once more use the words of Baruch), learn where wisdom dwells. For she is to be found in her essence only in God, and of him you must certainly seek her. But because the place you hold in the world is not a lowly one, and because you cannot abandon it, you will find it useful, in avoiding the cadences of pagan rhetoric in conversation, and in shunning at all times the sophistication of literary elegance, to observe a certain discretion. Be almost slothful in worldly matters; but stretch all the sinews of your mind in the discipline of the spirit. Be heedless of the former, but eager in the latter. Because you cannot of yourself hope entirely to avoid the

¹ 2 Cor. x, 3-5.

² Baruch iii, 22-24.

³ Eph. ii, 19.

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cunning of the serpent in the transaction of worldly affairs, let this be enough for you: that the wisdom of the spirit may devour your earthly prudence, and transform it into the secret substance of her body. The Scriptures tell us, concerning Pharaoh's magicians: 'They cast down every man his rod, and they became serpents, but Aaron's rod swallowed up their rods.'¹ Now, the rod of Aaron swallowed up the rods of the sorcerers because the wisdom of Christ, which it signified, has made void all the wisdom of the world, and has united in the bowels of His body, the Church, the wise men of this world.

Besides, it is absurd and disgraceful that we should show the same care and precision in human affairs that we devote to the things of God and of the spirit. That is why the Lord said to Moses: 'Take unto thee sweet spices, stacte and onycha and sweet-smelling galbanum and pure frankincense, and thou shalt make it a perfume, a confection after the art of the apothecary, tempered together, pure and holy.'²

We make a perfume of sweet spices when we diffuse the odour of a multiplicity of virtues around the altar of good works. And it is tempered together and pure, because the more we add to virtue, the more purely does the incense of good works rise up. And to these words of the Lord were added others: 'And thou shalt beat it very small, and put of it before the testimony in the tabernacle of the congregation.'³ We beat all these spices very small when we pound our good works in the pestle of our hearts by secret examination of our consciences and carefully consider whether they are truly good. To reduce the spices to dust is to grind our virtues by means of reflection and to subject them to the refinement of inner inquiry.

CHAPTER FOUR

Remember what was said of this dust: 'Thou shalt put of it before the testimony in the tabernacle of the congregation'; for our good works are truly pleasing in the sight of the Eternal Judge when our mind mills them by careful considera-

¹ Exod. vii, 12.

² Exod. xxx, 34-35.

³ Ibid., 36.

tion, and as it were reduces the spices to dust. Let not the good which we do contain anything harsh or coarse, lest, the severe hand of examination having failed to crush it, it should not send forth its most delicate fragrance. Such diligence, such pressing attention, is not, of course, to be shown to worldly things; its purpose is this—that we may be found pleasing in the sight of the Creator; not that we may appear glorious in this world, but that we may be wise in God’s sight in our judgement. That is why the Lord continued: ‘You shall not make for yourselves according to the composition thereof; it shall be unto you holy for the Lord’;¹ and afterwards: ‘Whosoever shall make like unto that, to smell thereto, shall even be cut off from his people.’² Whoever, then, devotes to the study of pagan letters, or to any earthly thing, that care which is chiefly due to that punctilious inner examination of ourselves whereby we may please God, deserves to perish, for he is devoting that incense which should be offered to God alone to transitory and vain things. And that which we say concerning knowledge must be admitted to apply to all the pleasures of this life. For it is fitting that worldly prudence should wither up in us straightway, and that the wisdom of the spirit alone should blossom again in our souls; as the Apostle tells us when he says: ‘If ye then be risen with Christ, seek the things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth.’³ It would be none the less fitting that this present existence should have no life in our hearts; that, being utterly dead to us, it should by no means delight us who are dead, as the same Apostle says: ‘Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death; that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.’⁴ Yet since these things are impossible especially for those who live in the world, who cannot altogether attain the summit of this other perfection, they must be reminded that they should endeavour to give at all events only

¹ Exod. xxx, 37.

³ Col. iii, 1-2.

² Ibid., 38.

⁴ Rom. vi, 4.

a secondary place to those things which they cannot completely despise.

CHAPTER FIVE

And because this present existence is as delightful to many men of the world as a coy wife, we must repeat at greater length that even if they cannot, because of the weakness of the spirit, hate it as they should, they must not begin to love it excessively; so that even if they have not as yet sufficient strength to give it a writ of separation they may be ashamed, nevertheless, to show it preference in comparison with their love of everlasting life. That is why the law declares: 'If a man have two wives, one beloved and another hated, and they have borne him children, both the beloved and the hated, and if the first-born son be hers that was hated, then it shall be, when he maketh his sons to inherit that which is indeed the first-born, by giving him a double portion of all that he hath; for he is the beginning of his strength; the right of the first-born is his.'¹ Now, these two wives of man are virtue and pleasure, at variance with each other, feeling jealousy, malice and hatred. And pleasure belongs to this life, but virtue to everlasting glory. The former is beloved because she allures her husband (the feeble soul) with seductive delights; the other is described as hated because she causes men to travel a narrow and painful road and always sets before them hard and bitter things. But the son of the hated wife is our first-born, for our Creator in the beginning gave virtue to us, but pleasure, and all the allurements of the flesh, proceed from the defects of our fallen nature. But, since there is not time to set forth word by word all the essence of the nature of this precept, let it suffice, for brevity's sake, to say that if we cannot drive out the beloved wife, who is certainly harmful to us, from sharing our bridal couch, let us at any rate strive to exalt the hated wife, who is upright and chaste, to the position of the first-born; so that even if it is difficult for us, in however small a degree, not to be aware of the sweetness of this life, the glory of mastery shall be granted

¹ Deut. xxi, 15-17.

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to virtue, the place of servitude to pleasure. The son of virtue shall rule in the dignity of the first-born; the son of pleasure shall remain a servant, always under the restraint of discipline.

Do you by any chance wish to know who are the sons of the beloved wife? Paul will give you the answer: 'Now the works of the flesh are manifest, which are these: adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies, envyings, murders, drunkenness, revellings and suchlike, of the which I tell you before, as I have also told you in times past, that they which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God.'¹ And would you like to hear now who are the offspring of the hated wife? Listen to what he says next: 'But the fruit of the spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance.'² The first-born son should therefore receive his double portion in this way: the fruit of the spirit should rule both body and soul, and should have rights over both the inner and the outer man.

CHAPTER SIX

If, then, you find it hard to be content with one wife, and have not the strength to give to the beloved wife whom you should hate a writ of separation, at least be sure that the hated wife, whom you should embrace with all your might, is given the highest place in the household of your heart. But she who is now wrongly beloved shall have the lowest place until such time as she shall gradually, by reason of her hideousness, become an object of aversion, and aversion be irrevocably turned into hatred. Let the son of the hated wife be your first-born, and let the multitude of your other children do him reverence. That is why we read that Joshua called down a curse upon Jericho after she had fallen, saying: 'Cursed be the man before the Lord, that riseth up and buildeth this city Jericho; he shall lay the foundation thereof in his firstborn, and in his youngest son shall he set up the gates of it.'³ For by Jericho which in

¹ Gal. v, 19-21.

² Ibid., 22.

³ Joshua vi, 26.

our language means 'moon', is signified our present life; so that he who builds the city of Jericho on his firstborn is he who loves the good things of this life above all else. And because Truth Himself has commanded, in the gospel: 'Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you',¹ anyone who is proved to have erred from this commandment is deservedly condemned by a curse, as the prophet bears witness when he says: 'They are cursed who do err from thy commandments.'² On the other hand, he may be said to set up the gates of Jericho in his youngest son who so uses this world's goods that he does not possess them with desire but yearns with all his heart for the reward of heavenly glory. He who sets earthly things below heavenly ones in his love cares not a straw for perishable things. In doing this, he makes the son of the hated wife the first-born, according to the commandment of the law, and as Joshua says, raises the gates of Jericho on the youngest of his children. Cain, on the other hand, built a city upon his first-born son Enoch because he did not hope for an inheritance to come; and because he destined himself over-hastily for the Jericho of this world, he incurred the sentence of everlasting damnation. Hence it is written: 'An inheritance may be gotten hastily at the beginning; but the end thereof shall not be blessed.'³

And so, beloved, if you cannot yet be content with the life of the spirit alone as your only bride, but are held bound by the evil caresses and allurements of life in the world, at least let the love of everlasting life hold first place in the household of your heart, as befits the first-born; and let concern for earthly things be in a place of subjection, as an inferior to be kept in check. In the Song of Songs it is said: 'His left hand is under my head, and his right hand doth embrace me.'⁴ Now the left hand is said to be under the head when this life is scorned and despised by the mind, which is the head and source of our thoughts. He is held in the embrace of the right hand who at

¹ Matt. vi, 33.

³ Prov. xx, 21.

² Ps. cxix, 21.

⁴ Song of Sol. ii, 6.

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all times takes pleasure in longing for eternal life alone. And because Solomon also says: 'Give a portion to seven and also to eight',¹ hasten forward in this life, which is signified by the number seven, in suchwise that you may now strive with all your powers to abide in the love of life everlasting, which through the number eight signifies the glory of the resurrection. Show only a careless and fleeting concern for this world; fix your unwavering and enduring purpose of unfailing love on the world to come, which is everlasting. Moreover, I would like to remind you that what I have said of this mortal life applies also to the wisdom of the world, so that in your soul mortal life and earthly wisdom may yield, trodden down, as it were by the heel of the mind. But may the love of eternal life and zeal for spiritual wisdom surpass all other things, set on the highest pinnacle of your heart, so that when you spurn this life and its wisdom, you may deserve by happy exchange to be filled with the divine Spirit, who will urge you on to eternal glory.

Blessed be the name of the Lord.

¹ Eccles. xi, 2.

Sermon for the feast of Epiphany

‘When Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Juda, in the days of Herod the king, behold, there came wise men from the East to Jerusalem, saying, Where is He that is born King of the Jews? for we have seen His star in the east, and are come with gifts to worship him.’¹ Praise the Lord, all ye nations: praise Him, all ye people.² For before the Almighty Word came down from His heavenly throne, and when the night was in the midst of her course, the people of the Gentiles walked in darkness³ because they loved darkness rather than light,⁴ and they followed the paths of error and stood in the way of sinners,⁵ each going his own way, one to his farm, another to his merchandise,⁶ and their foolish hearts were darkened;⁷ they were too much concerned with the work of their hands. All their fathers of old were under the cloud,⁸ so that they saw with the eyes of night, and could not look upon the glory of Moses’ countenance; there was a veil over their hearts, and dark waters and thick clouds in the skies;⁹ for the precious sons of Zion were turned into earthen pitchers, the work of the potter’s hand, the stones of the sanctuary were scattered at the top of every street, their silver was turned into dross, and their innkeepers mixed water with their wine; the gold became dim, and the most fine gold was changed;¹⁰ there was none of them that did good; no, not one.¹¹ Then there was darkness over the whole

¹ Matt. ii, 1.

⁴ John iii, 19.

⁷ Rom. i, 21.

¹⁰ Lam. iv, 1.

² Ps. cxvii, 1.

⁵ Ps. i, 1.

⁸ 1 Cor. x, 1.

¹¹ Ps. xiv, 3.

³ Isa. ix, 2.

⁶ Matt. xxii, 5.

⁹ Ps. xviii, 11.

earth, for Jew and Gentile alike made their beds in the shadows, dwelling in darkness and in the shadow of death.¹ But the night was far spent, and the day was at hand; a light shone in our prison-house, a light arose in the darkness unto the upright, and the dayspring from on high visited us; that morning star which knows no setting rose when the true Light, which lights every man that comes into the world, shone in the darkness, and the darkness comprehended it not.²

Therefore the Jews and the Gentiles were in darkness until the time of fulfilment. But when the fullness of time was come the Lord sent the lamb to the ruler of the land from the rock in the wilderness to the mount of the daughter of Zion,³ and the stone which the builders rejected became the headstone of the corner. And because He came to gather together the scattered sheep (although He was sent in the first place only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel yet He had other sheep that were not of that fold, and it was necessary for Him to bring them also, so that there might be one fold and one shepherd),⁴ the light rose on all who dwelt in the land of the shadow of death, Jew and Gentile alike. That is why, at the Lord's birth, the brightness of God shone round about the shepherds, because the angel brought them good tidings of great joy; and on this day which we celebrate the brightness of the star bore witness to the presence of the newly-born Saviour. The voice of the angels spoke to the Jews, as to reasonable men; the star of heaven was the instrument of speech to the Gentiles, since they were like the beasts of wood and field. And so a light heralded the Light, a created thing bore witness to its Creator, the thing made spoke of its Maker, and a new star declared the true Sun. Praise, therefore, the Lord, all ye nations: praise him, all ye people. Rejoice, ye Gentiles, with his people.⁵ Let the Gentiles be glad and the Jews exult; for the Sun has shone forth from the star, and the Maker of the Virgin has been formed in the Virgin his creature. The man who was formed in her was also the Highest Himself who

¹ Luke i, 79.

⁴ John x, 16.

² John i, 5.

⁵ Rom. xv, 10.

³ Isa. xvi, 1.

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established her.¹ The Sun has risen from a star, health from sickness, life from death, light from darkness, sweetness from bitterness, a rose from a thorn, a father from his daughter, a lord from his handmaiden, and from a little stream has come a well of water springing up into everlasting life.² So the Sun has risen from a star and was also heralded by a star.

There was a star in the sky, a star on earth and the Sun in the manger. The star in the sky was that bright heavenly body; the star on earth, the Virgin Mary; the Sun in the manger, Christ our Lord. Of the star in the sky we read in the Gospel: 'We have seen His star in the east, and are come to worship Him.'³ Of the star on earth, Balaam prophesied: 'There shall come a Star out of Jacob that shall smite all the nations.'⁴ According to the Book of Wisdom, the wicked shall say of the Sun in the manger: 'We have strayed from the path of truth, and the sun of justice has not shone upon us.'⁵ Of Him the Apostle says: 'Let not the sun go down upon your anger.'⁶ Is it not He who set the tabernacle of His flesh in the sun when He was as a bridegroom coming out of his chamber?⁷

A star, brethren, has four main characteristics: it has the nature of fire, it is bright and clear, it sends forth a ray and it shines in the night. We can find all these qualities in our star, the Virgin Mary. She is that burning bush in which the Lord appeared to Moses, which burned with fire and yet was not consumed; for though she was with child she was not consumed by the flames of desire. She is in herself bright and splendid, so that it was said of her in the Song of Songs: 'Who is she that cometh forth as the morning rising, fair as the moon, clear as the sun?'⁸ And she has sent forth from herself a ray which pierces to the secret places of the heart and searches the heart and the reins;⁹ this is the living Word of God, quick and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit. The meaning of her name is very fitting, for Mary means 'star of the sea'.

¹ Ps. lxxxvii, 5.

⁴ Num. xxiv, 17.

⁷ Ps. xix, 4-5.

² John iv, 14.

⁵ Wisd. of Sol. v, 6.

⁸ Song of Sol. vi, 10.

³ Matt. ii, 2.

⁶ Eph. iv, 26.

⁹ Jer. xvii, 10.

The sea is this world, of which it was written: 'This great and wide sea, wherein are innumerable creeping things.'¹ And she is rightly named 'star of the sea', for she shines on the world like an incomparable star, and her brightness makes the world light, and she has sent forth from herself that ray 'which lighteth every man that cometh into the world'. And just as the ray issues from the star without destroying the star's integrity, so the Son came forth from the Virgin while her virginity remained inviolate, as Ezekiel prophesied: 'This gate shall be shut, and no man shall enter in by it, but the Lord alone shall enter in by it.'² A star shines in the night, and the Virgin shines in the night of this world with an incomparable light, so that it was said of her: 'Thou alone hast destroyed all heresies throughout the whole world.'³ Such is our star, brethren, such is the Virgin Mary, the star of the sea, and because she has left us an example, that we should follow her steps, of such kind should our souls be.

Let us then, brethren, have the nature of fire, so that we may have in us that fire which the Lord came to send on the earth;⁴ may that fire which blazed in the bones of Jeremiah be kindled in the melting-furnace of our hearts, where the Lord sits purifying and cleansing the sons of Levi.⁵ Let us be clear and shining that the day may break upon us, and the shadows flee away;⁶ so that putting off the old man with his deeds we may put on the new man which is created after God;⁷ for we were sometimes darkness, but now are we light in the Lord.⁸ Then let us put on the armour of light, and walk honestly, as in the day.⁹ Let us send forth from ourselves the ray of good works, for it is written: 'Let your loins be girded up and lanterns burning in your hands.'¹⁰ To carry burning lanterns in our hands is to shine upon our neighbours by the example of our righteous deeds and to draw back the curtain; and let him that heareth say, Come.¹¹ Let your light so shine before men that

¹ Ps. civ, 25.

² Ezek. xlv, 2.

³ Tract of the Mass, 'Salve, sancta parens' of the Common of the B.V.M.

⁴ Luke xii, 49.

⁵ Mal. iii, 3.

⁶ Song of Sol. ii, 17.

⁷ Col. iii, 9-10.

⁸ Eph. v, 8.

⁹ Rom. xiii, 12-13.

¹⁰ Luke xii, 35.

¹¹ Rev. xxii, 17.

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they may see your good works and glorify your Father which is in heaven,¹ and many shall run after the odour of your ointments.²

A star shines in the night: let us, brethren, shine in this world of night, for the Scriptures say: 'among them you shine as lights set in the heavens.'³ Let us shine with the brightness of wisdom among the shadows of heresy, for it is written: 'Take us the little foxes, that spoil the Lord's vine.'⁴ That is why the Lord says: 'Be ye wise as serpents and harmless as doves.'⁵ And so, brethren, if we follow in the footsteps of the Virgin, our star, we will be enabled to attain to the true Sun.

The sun has five main characteristics. It is unchangeable of its very nature, whereas the moon changes each month. It is unflawed by any spot, whereas the moon is always spotted. The sun possesses a fullness of light, and the other heavenly bodies take their light from it. Although it is unchangeable, the sun sometimes suffers eclipse; and it shines always by day. Let us look carefully for these characteristics in our true Sun. The sun is of its very nature unchangeable, and Christ Himself remains unchangeable by the power of His divine nature. He Himself says: 'I am the Lord: I change not';⁶ in Him there is no change nor shadow of alteration. The sun is without flaw, as He is who alone came into the world without stain, for He has done no violence, neither was any deceit in His mouth.⁷ The sun possesses a fullness of light, and in Him to whom God did not give the Spirit by measure all the fullness of the Godhead dwells bodily;⁸ and of His fullness we have all received, and grace for grace,⁹ and it is like the precious ointment which ran from Aaron's head to his beard and from there to the hem of his garments. The sun sometimes suffers eclipse; and Christ Himself suffered in His passion the eclipse of death when the Shepherd departed, laying down His life for His sheep, and He bowed His head and gave up the ghost. The

¹ Matt. v, 16.

⁴ Song of Sol. ii, 15.

⁷ Isa. liii, 9.

² Song of Sol. i, 3.

⁵ Matt. x, 16.

⁸ Col. ii, 9.

³ Phil. ii, 15.

⁶ Mal. iii, 6.

⁹ John i, 16.

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sun shines always by day, and the Lord after His resurrection brought to naught the darkness of human mortality; being raised from the dead He dieth no more; death hath no more dominion over Him.¹ He dwells in the light which no man can approach unto² and in Him is no darkness at all.³ John the solitary eagle beheld His unreflected light with the naked eye, when he soared so high that the whole world would not have been able to contain him if he had thundered a little higher: 'In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.'⁴

The enlightened wise men who dwell in the land of the sun's rising came to the Sun; the star which takes its light from the sun led them to adore the Sun. Let us take good heed of what they did. They came from the east to Jerusalem, and when they had come they asked: 'Where is He that is born King of the Jews?' They came to the place where He was and fell down; falling down they worshipped Him; worshipping Him, they offered Him gifts. They journeyed with unwearying toil; they inquired with careful anxiety; they fell down in proper humility; they worshipped Him in piety of spirit; and they offered Him gifts in the pure devotion of faith. 'And they presented unto Him gold and frankincense and myrrh.'⁵ See, the first-fruits of the Gentiles were the first to offer a pure and untainted belief. To God they offered incense, to the mortal man myrrh, and gold to the king. The incense showed their belief in His divinity, the myrrh their belief in His mortal humanity and the gold their belief in His royal majesty. For He was both God and man, Emmanuel, which means 'God with us'; He was made both rich and poor; and He was of kingly race, as is written in His genealogy: 'The book of the generation of Jesus Christ the son of David, the son of Abraham.'⁶

Or we may say that all three gifts were offered to the human Christ: the gold to the king, the incense to the priest and the myrrh to the mortal man. For He was of priestly as well as royal descent. He was a king, and on His vesture and on His

¹ Rom. vi, 9.

⁴ John i, 1.

² 1 Tim. vi, 16.

⁵ Matt. ii, 11.

³ 1 John i, 5.

⁶ Matt. i, 1.

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thigh was written 'King of kings and Lord of lords'.¹ And He was a priest after the order of Melchizedek the king of Salem, who was the priest of the most high God; for neither by the blood of goats and calves, but by His own blood He entered in once into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption for us.² For we are now returned unto the shepherd and bishop of our souls.³ He was a mortal man too, for surely He hath borne our griefs and carried our sorrows in His body on the Cross. The Virgin herself, the star of the sea, offered these same gifts in her own person to the Sun who was born of her. She offered the gold of royal majesty, for she herself was of kingly race: 'And Jacob begat Joseph the husband of Mary, of whom was born Jesus, who is called Christ.'⁴ She offered frankincense and myrrh too, and so we read of her in the Song of Songs: 'Who is this that cometh out of the wilderness like pillars of smoke, perfumed with myrrh and frankincense, with all the powders of the merchant?'⁵ Myrrh guards the bodies of the dead from worms and preserves them from corruption; this is why Nicodemus brought a mixture of myrrh and aloes to embalm the body of Jesus. Myrrh symbolizes the purity of the flesh and frankincense the devotion of the spirit. We do well to perceive these qualities in our virgin star, for purity of body and devotion of spirit alike endured for ever in the Virgin Mary. And it is right that 'all the powders of the merchant' should be added; for she was so filled with the gifts of the Holy Spirit that she deserved to hear the greeting: 'Hail, thou that art full of grace, the Lord is with thee, blessed art thou among women and blessed is the fruit of thy womb.'⁶ These, brethren, are the gifts which were offered by the wise men and by the Virgin Mary. And since they have given us an example, let us do likewise.

The kings came; let us come too, for it is written: 'Come to me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest';⁷ and elsewhere: 'Come to me, all ye who desire me.'⁸

¹ Rev. xix, 16.

⁴ Matt. i, 16.

⁷ Matt. xi, 28.

² Heb. ix, 12.

⁵ Song of Sol. iii, 6.

⁸ Eccles. xxiv, 26.

³ 1 Pet. ii, 25.

⁶ Luke i, 28, 42.

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The wise men sought Him; let us seek Him also, for it is written: 'Seek ye the Lord while he may be found.'¹ They fell down; let us do likewise, for the Psalmist says: 'O come; let us worship and bow down.'² They adored Him; let us too adore Him, for the Scriptures say: 'Worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness.'³ They offered gifts to Him; we must do the same, for it is written: 'I beseech you, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service.'⁴ Let us offer those three gifts which the wise men presented, but under a different form: the myrrh of mortification, so that mortifying our members which are on earth we may hold our bodies and their desires as of no account, crucifying the flesh with its affections and lusts,⁵ and in all these things let our service be reasonable; the incense of devout prayer, in accordance with the words of the Apostle: 'I will pray with the spirit, and I will pray with the understanding also; I will sing with the spirit, and I will sing with the understanding also,'⁶ so that 'my prayer may be set before the Lord as incense';⁷ gold too, the splendour of wisdom (for gold symbolizes wisdom, according to the text: 'There is desirable treasure in the mouth of a wise man'),⁸ that we may be prepared to give an account of the faith and hope that is in us to any inquirer, and may shine with the splendour of wisdom, and fight without fear against the darkness of heresy; that we may be able to say: 'The law of thy mouth is better unto me than thousands of gold and silver.'⁹ I would that you were not more likely to say 'The law of Justinian's mouth is better unto me than thousands of gold and silver.' 'The proud have digged pits for me, which are not after thy law';¹⁰ 'they have forsaken the Lord, the fountain of living waters'¹¹ so that Wisdom may rightly complain: 'They have forsaken me, the fountain of living waters.'¹² For those who should meditate upon the law of the Lord night and

¹ Isa. lv, 6.

⁴ Rom. xii, 1.

⁷ Ps. cxli, 2.

¹⁰ Ibid., 85.

² Ps. xcv, 6.

⁵ Gal. v, 24.

⁸ Prov. xxi, 20 (misreading).

¹¹ Jer. xvii, 13.

³ Ps. xxix, 2.

⁶ 1 Cor. xiv, 15.

⁹ Ps. cxix, 72.

¹² Jer. ii, 13.

day have turned from the truth to listen to fables. Let the sentries set upon the walls of the Church be watchful, lest Samson's foxes should burn our standing corn; and let the tower of David whereon there hang a thousand bucklers be set against Damascus, 'for the Lord's name is a mighty tower; the righteous runneth into it and is safe.'¹ These are the Holy Writings in which the Lord's name is invoked; and bishops and teachers are established in this fortress, who must keep its boundaries. Of them it is written: 'Remove not the ancient landmarks which thy fathers have set.' For Moses set bounds around Mount Sinai, which might not be passed. Would that no man would pass these bounds who was not worthy of the stone tablets of the Law. Upon this fortress of Holy Scripture there hang a thousand bucklers. The perfection of authority, that is, against the power of the heretics. For no other foundation can man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ,² that is, the mystery of Christ.

The mystery of Christ is unchangeable and immovable, for there is manifold witness to it. The witness of men and women, of those in the prime of life and of the aged, of things earthly and heavenly, of Gentile and Jew, of ancient times and of His own day; the witness of light and of darkness, of the Law and the Prophets, of kings and of the multitude, of living and dead, of brute beasts, of the sun and of the elements. There was the witness of men, for there were shepherds in that country, and coming they made known the saying which was told them concerning this child;³ the witness of angels, for 'the angel of the Lord came upon them . . . and said to them 'Behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy . . . for unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord.'⁴ And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying, Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men of good will.'⁵ There was the witness of women, for Anna the prophetess, Phanuel's daughter, gave thanks to the Lord and spoke of Him to all that

¹ Prov. xviii, 10.

² 1 Cor. iii, 11.

³ Luke ii, 8, 17.

⁴ Ibid., 9-11.

⁵ Ibid., 13, 14.

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looked for redemption in Jerusalem.¹ There was the witness of men in their prime, for on one day three thousand were converted and on another five thousand; and of old men, for Simeon the ancient of days, whose hair was like white wool, who had received an answer from the Holy Spirit that he should not see death before he had seen the Lord's Christ, taking Him in his arms said: 'Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word; for mine eyes have seen thy salvation.'² There was, too, the witness of children, for those Innocents confessed the Lord not with their tongues but by their deaths. Earthly things bore witness, for there was peace on earth to men of good will; so much peace that the whole world could be enrolled by one man, Caesar Augustus. Of his peace, Isaiah said: 'They shall beat their swords into ploughshares and their spears into pruning-hooks.'³ The heavens bore witness too, and sent a new star, as the Gospel says: 'And lo, the star, which they saw in the east, went before them, till it came and stood over where the young child was.'⁴ The Gentiles bore witness, for the wise men, coming to Jerusalem, said: 'Where is He that is born King of the Jews?'⁵ The Jews bore witness, for Herod, gathering together the chief priests and scribes of the people, demanded of them where the Christ should be born, and they said: 'In Bethlehem of Judaea.'⁶ The ancients bore witness, for He used similitudes by the ministry of the prophets.⁷ He is the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world.⁸ The men of His own time bore witness, so that He said to His disciples: 'Ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth.'⁹ Light bore witness, for the glory of the Lord shone round about the shepherds and the brightness of the star shone upon the wise men. Darkness bore witness, for at His death darkness covered the face of the earth. The Law bore witness, for Moses said in the Law: 'The Lord thy God will raise up

¹ Luke ii, 36-38.

⁴ Matt. ii, 9.

⁷ Hos. xii, 10.

² Ibid., 26-30.

⁵ Ibid., 2.

⁸ Rev. xiii, 8.

³ Isa. ii, 4.

⁶ Ibid., ii, 4-5.

⁹ Acts i, 8.

unto thee a Prophet from the midst of thee; unto him shall ye hearken,'¹ and again: 'Thy life shall hang on a tree; and thou shalt see and shalt not understand.' The prophets bore witness. Isaiah said: 'And there shall come forth a rod out of the stem of Jesse, and a branch shall grow out of his root, and the spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him.'² And again: 'Behold a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel.'³ And Baruch says: 'After this he revealed himself on earth, and spoke with mortal men.'⁴ Ezekiel was called 'son' in bearing witness. Daniel says: 'When the holy of holies is come, your anointing shall cease.' Hosea took to himself a wife of whoredoms to bear witness to Him.⁵ Habbakuk said: 'He had horns coming out of his hands.'⁶ Jonah in the whale's belly bore witness to His testimony. But why enumerate each one? There was no prophet who did not bear witness to Him. Kings too bore witness; so King David said: 'Our land shall yield her increase';⁷ and again: 'Let the earth open, and let them bring forth salvation.'⁸ And Solomon says: 'Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth, for thy breasts are better than wine, because of the savour of thy good ointments' and 'While the king sitteth at his table my spikenard sendeth forth the smell thereof.'⁹ The multitudes bore witness, for the Gospel tells us that they said: 'We have seen strange things today,'¹⁰ and 'If this man were not God, he could do nothing.'¹¹ And because of this they wanted to take Him by force and make Him king. Living men bore witness, for the two who were travelling to Emmaus came and told all that had befallen them. Dead men bore witness, for 'many bodies of the saints which slept arose and appeared to many.'¹² The brute beasts bore witness: 'The ox knoweth his owner and the ass his master's crib.'¹³ The sun bore witness when it was darkened. The earth and the elements bore witness in the great earthquake.¹⁴ The air bore

¹ Deut. xviii, 15.

⁴ Baruch iii, 38.

⁷ Ps. lxxxv, 12.

⁹ Song of Sol. i, 2 and 12.

¹¹ John ix, 33.

¹⁴ Matt. xxvii, 51.

² Isa. xi, 1-2.

⁵ Hos. i, 2.

⁸ This is, of course, not David, but Isa. lxxv, 8.

¹² Matt. xxvii, 52-53.

³ Ibid., vii, 14.

⁶ Hab. iii, 4.

¹⁰ Luke v. 26.

¹³ Isa. i, 3.

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witness when a cloud received him out of the sight of his disciples.¹ Fire bore witness when the angel of the Lord descended from heaven, and his countenance was like lightning,² for lightning has the nature of fire.

Since then, brethren, the mystery of the Cross had the witness of all that I have mentioned, let the unhappy Jew be ashamed who denies Christ born of the Virgin, for the Jewish shepherds found what was declared unto them. Let the gentile who says to a stock 'Thou art my God' and to a stone 'Thou has brought me forth'³ be confounded; for the gentile wise men adored Him. Let the heretic who denies the mystery of the Cross be silent. Let every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.⁴ And may our Lord Jesus, who is the splendour of lights, the flower of flowers, the life of goodness, the school of virtues and the crown of the saints, and who reigns over the choirs of angels for ever and ever lead us to that glory. Amen.

¹ John vi, 19.

³ Jer. ii, 27.

² Matt. xxviii, 2-3.

⁴ Phil. ii, 11.

A Homily in Honour and Praise of St. Benedict, Abbot and Confessor

‘Simon Peter said to Jesus: “Behold, we have forsaken all, and followed thee.”’¹

We should be obliged to labour with all our strength on this special feast of our father were it not that the noble tongue of Gregory has given a magnificent account of his whole life.² His work is of such kind that he has depicted the saint’s life with the brightness of flowing eloquence; his style glows with the majesty of his periods and his sentences shine in the clarity of his style. It is superfluous, therefore, to add anything to what such a man has already said; for we know that in comparison with him we are not only lacking in eloquence but dumb. It is enough to say that St. Benedict will give to the Heavenly Prince a great army, and fill the heavenly mansions with a throng of monks living an angelic life. How splendid and glorious a warrior he will appear before the imperial tribunal, full of infinite virtue, accompanied by an innumerable troop of soldiers, the King’s counsellor, the Judge’s friend, the peerless enemy of our ancient foe!

Simon Peter’s words to Jesus: ‘Behold, we have forsaken all’, apply to him and to all who follow him. This is a friendly saying of Simon’s, a word lovelier than all the flowers of rhetoric; and Simon is worthy to speak more fully with the Saviour. Now Simon means ‘obedient’ and Jesus means ‘saviour’. Obedience, then, speaks with salvation; for eternal

¹ Matt. xix, 27.

² Gregory the Great, *Dialogus*, i.

salvation is due by hereditary right to the obedient alone, and only to them if Peter is there too; if, that is to say, obedience is unwavering and unshaken and founded on the solid rock. What does he say? 'Behold, we have forsaken all and followed thee.' Solemn word, mighty undertaking, a holy work and one worthy of blessing, to leave all things and follow Christ. These are the persuasive words of voluntary poverty, which have brought forth monasteries, and filled the cloister with monks and the woods with anchorites. These are the words of which the Church sings: 'By the word of thy lips I have kept me from the paths of the destroyer.'¹ We shall receive rest for our labour, riches for our poverty, a reward for our tribulation. It is a great thing to forsake all, but to follow Christ is a greater; for we read of many who have left all but who have not followed Christ. This is our task, this our labour; in this lies the essence of human salvation; nor can we follow Christ unless we forsake all, for He rejoices as a strong man to run a race,² and he who bears a load cannot follow. No one swims bearing loads, says that orator of secular teaching whose nobility of style and profundity of meaning have made him a friend of poverty. He does right to forsake all things who is following Him who is above all things; for our sufficiency is of God,³ and God will be all in all.⁴

'Behold,' he says, 'we have forsaken all'—not only the riches of this world but the desires of the soul too; for he who holds on to the self has not forsaken all. And it is useless to abandon other things if we do not abandon ourselves, since man's heaviest burden is man himself. What tyrant is more cruel to man, what power more savage, than his own will? Under its sway you can never rest or sit at your ease, and the more it wearies you in enforcing obedience to itself, the more it goads and stings and weighs you down, being unmindful of kindness and a stranger to mercy. This is the nature of self-will: the more obedient its subject, the more cruelly is he bound in its chains. It alone is loved; yet it deserves nothing but hatred,

¹ Ps. xvii, 4.³ 2 Cor. iii, 5.² Ps. xix, 5.⁴ 1 Cor. xv, 28.

for it is the foundation of iniquity, the source of death and the great destroyer of virtue. 'Come, then, all ye that labour and are heavy laden'¹ to the lightener of loads, and answer Him in word and deed: 'Behold, we have forsaken all and followed thee.' Mark how once, before the Word was made flesh and dwelt amongst us, the Fathers of ancient times followed God, cleaving by the spirit alone to Him who was only spirit. Now, however, we must follow Him with our bodies also; for although we read that these fathers abounded in worldly riches, we know now that whosoever he be of you that forsaketh not all that he hath, he cannot be the disciple² of Him who, though He was rich yet for our sakes He became poor.³ We must forsake all our possessions and our own wills, then, if we wish to follow Him who had nowhere to lay His head,⁴ who came to do not His own will but the will of Him that sent Him.⁵

The words which follow are these: 'What shall we have therefore?' Peter has forsaken all; not only is he following, he has followed for a long time; and now for the first time he asks what he will receive. What, Peter? Did you not promise obedience to the voice? You made no contract with the Lord. But listen to what the Lord God says, and await that hope in which, in this uncertain world, we must confide. 'Verily I say unto you, that ye which have followed me, in the regeneration where the Son of Man shall sit in the throne of his glory, you also shall sit and judge.'⁶ How infinite is the sweetness of the Lord's mercies to His poor; He does not forsake in death those for whom He gave Himself to agony and death. 'Ye which have followed me', He says, 'shall, in the regeneration, when the Son of Man shall sit in the throne of his glory, also sit and judge.' What is this but to say that we shall accompany Him whom we follow; but only if we follow perseveringly, for it is written 'Seek peace, and pursue it'.⁷ So run, therefore, that ye may obtain, and do not long to be idle before you have

¹ Matt. xi, 28.² Luke xiv, 33.³ 2 Cor. viii, 9.⁴ Luke ix, 58.⁵ John vi, 38.⁶ Matt. xix, 28.⁷ Ps. xxxiv, 14.

attained to Him who is seated, and so deserved to sit with Him. For 'He rejoiced as a strong man to run a race'¹ during all the time that He revealed Himself on earth and held converse with mortal men;² nor did He sit idle until He came to Him whom He Himself had established as the end of striving and sadness: 'my soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death', He said.³ Therefore, when the Son of man, who first endured the shameful torment of the cross, and was tried by pain and mockery, shall sit on the throne of His glory, you also shall sit and judge; but which of you, who give yourselves no rest, shall begin to judge, since he came not to judge but to be judged, not to be ministered to, but to minister? There indeed are set thrones of judgment.⁴ Our Saviour, God's Son, who has an indivisible unity of nature, sits, because He is God, at the right hand of God;⁵ because He is man, He appears in the presence of God for us.⁶ Nor will He sit in triumph until God is all in all, that is, until the body is united to the head in such peace that we shall be like Him, though not equal to Him. At this moment, however, He is still denied by the Jews, mocked by the Gentiles, wounded by heretics, and seriously assailed by false Christians; do you really think He sits in quietness, paying no heed to the glances of the arrogant, the attacks of the wicked, the desires of those who reject Him? But in the regeneration He will sit with His followers, where we shall be cleansed to clearest light in soul and body; then He, having overthrown His enemies, will enter with His friends into glory, joining angels and men in everlasting unity and restoring the losses of the Holy City. All this shall come about in the regeneration. Blessed regeneration, which will renew heaven and earth, join together the dwellers on earth with the inhabitants of heaven, and cause the fountain of perpetual peace to flow in an unending stream.

Mark that there is one birth, but two regenerations. In our birth, which springs from a diseased root, our bodies are made subject to death and our souls filled with iniquity. In the

¹ Ps. xix, 5.² Baruch iii, 38.³ Matt. xxvi, 38.⁴ Ps. cxxii, 5.⁵ Ps. cx, 1.⁶ Heb. ix, 24.

regeneration of baptism, in which we must be born again, the soul is cleansed from iniquity, but our bodies are not freed from death. A second regeneration, the resurrection, is necessary, that our bodies may be found fashioned like to the glorious body of Christ;¹ but this will only take place if our hearts are first made meek and humble like His heart. Therefore 'blessed and holy is he that hath part in the first resurrection'² for he shall have part in the second also. 'In that regeneration when the Son of man shall sit in the throne of his glory, you also shall sit and judge.'

That is why the Scriptures say elsewhere: 'For your shame ye shall have double; and for confusion they shall rejoice in their portion.'³ The poverty of those who follow the Lord brings in its train two things: suffering and lowliness. So the Prophet says: 'Look upon mine affliction and my pain.'⁴ Because of this, they shall have double in their land: the dignity of judicial power for their lowliness, and the refreshment of tranquil peace for their suffering. When, then, shall we too sit at ease, who know no rest or quiet or stability in soul or body? When shall we be freed from the restlessness of our unquiet nature? Our bodies can know no rest; they are prevented by knowledge of present pain, fear of death to come, passible and mortal as they are. Neither can our spirits, because we await in hope, and are anxious and fearful. But a time will come when the soul will rest in one hope alone; it will be freed from anxiety, though not from expectation. That will be its state between the death of the body and the day of judgement. For in that day, when the Son of man shall sit, we also will sit perfect in all things, our bodies undisturbed by knowledge of pain, undistressed by the fear of death, gloriously clothed in the twofold robe of impassibility and immortality, and our souls free from all expectation and anxiety, lacking nothing and fearing no peril, in most perfect security and secure perfection. 'You shall sit', says the Lord who is Truth. Splendid sitting, welcome rest, full sufficiency. 'Ye sons of

¹ Phil. iii, 21.³ Isa. lxi, 7.² Rev. xx, 6.⁴ Ps. xxv, 18.

men, how long will ye be dull of heart? How long will ye love vanity and seek after lying?'¹ You seek glory from your fellow-men, a vain and deceitful glory, for men are vain and men are liars; you do not desire the glory which comes from God alone, the only true and lasting glory. Wretched and pitiable creatures, who lose the fountain of delight for the sake of brief pleasure, and cut yourselves off from the Divine mercy, so that you will never drink your fill at the breasts of His comfort.

But lest our long awaiting should mar the sweetness of His promise, He controls the restlessness of our minds with a sweeter word. 'For he knoweth our frame';² He knows that our weakness cannot brook delays; in His loving kindness He meets this problem and counteracts it, saying: 'And everyone that hath forsaken house, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands for my name's sake, shall receive an hundredfold, and shall inherit everlasting life.'³ 'The mouth of them that speak lies shall be stopped';⁴ now all they who transgress without cause are ashamed.⁵ For we have promise of the life that now is, as well as of that which is to come;⁶ and it is clear that the promise of receiving a hundred-fold applies to this life, since the words which follow are '*and shall inherit everlasting life*'. But, to remove all possibility of argument or denial, read St. Mark's Gospel, where it is clearly shown that the promise of receiving a hundredfold applies to this life. For the Lord says: 'There is no man that hath left house, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife or children, or lands, for my sake and the gospels, but he shall receive an hundredfold now in this time, houses and brethren etc.'⁷ And for our greater wonder, lest we should think that the promise, although it applies to this life, concerns worldly goods, He adds: 'with persecutions'.⁸ What of earthly substance did the holy martyrs receive in the time of their persecution, when the very earth of their holy bodies was given into the hands of wicked men? So we must not take the promise of

¹ Ps. iv, 2.² Ps. ciii, 14.³ Matt. xix, 29.⁴ Ps. lxiii, 11.⁵ Ps. xxv, 3.⁶ 1 Tim. iv, 8.⁷ Mark x, 29-30.⁸ Mark x, 30.

receiving houses and brethren etc. a hundredfold to apply literally—for it is obvious that no man can receive a hundred mothers! But if we take this promise to mean that community of goods and mutual affection which exists among the elect, we can come part of the way towards understanding it; but only part of the way. For we know that some of the saints have lacked all earthly and human consolation. You must therefore look for this hundredfold reward in your heart, in the inner man, that now you may reap the fruits of holiness and at the end life everlasting.

Those who have not yet received the hundredfold reward must scrutinize their hearts and diligently examine all the work of their hands; they will certainly find some corner or lodging-place unknown to the Saviour. Yet the foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests. Let them forsake all more completely; let them not seek their own, let them not keep anything, either for themselves or for others. For there are many who, while despising their own desires and ambitions, keep for others what they ought to relinquish, for ever striving on their behalf with an unsuitable solicitude which is contrary to religion. How many monks lose their souls through having a greater regard for their kinsmen than is right? Let them forsake all, and follow Christ; let them strive to please Christ alone and cleave to His good will and pleasure with watchful care; then they will certainly experience what Truth Himself promised to those who forsake all and follow Him: 'He shall receive an hundredfold, and shall inherit everlasting life.' The first is given to comfort us on our journey; the second shall be given to us for blessedness in our native land for ever. And what is our hundredfold reward but the consolations, the visitations and the firstfruits of the Spirit, sweeter than honey; the witness of our consciences; the joyous and lovely expectation of the just, the memory of God's abundant sweetness, the great multitude of His delights, of which there is no need to tell those who have known them, just as it is impossible to describe them to those who have not known them. It is not father or mother, house or lands, food

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or clothing, nor any earthly or bodily thing, but something more delectable and sweeter and more joyous than any of them.

There is no one to whom all this exposition of our text better applies than to our father and master St. Benedict. He forsook the world and all its flowers in boyhood to run with strong strides after the running Christ; and he did not rest until he had caught up with Him. Who shall be given a higher place among the judges? Who more than he received a hundredfold in this life? By his intercession, therefore, may He who came that we may have life and have it more abundantly vouchsafe to grant to us the bounty of His grace, that we may be comforted on earth and inherit everlasting life, Jesus Christ our Lord, who is for ever blessed. Amen.

Sermon for the Feast of the Finding of the Holy Cross

Today, dearly beloved, we celebrate the finding of the Cross; and we should all rejoice together in Christ, because the treasure-house of all the world is found; and as He, finding the sheep or the goat which was lost, summoned His friends and neighbours and rejoiced, so it is right that we, having found that which He did not lose, but by which He regained us who were lost, should glory; especially since the Apostle says: 'God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ.'¹ Moreover our lively minds should the more readily be filled with spiritual joy since we know that the enemy of human salvation is sighing bitterly. For the devil rejoiced, thinking that he had escaped the disgrace of his shameful confounding, when the triumphal standard under which he was vanquished, bowed to the dust and made captive, remained hidden; and the dishonour of the downfall which his defeat had brought upon him was offset by the concealment of the emblem of victory. But when it was found, when it was revealed to the piety and devotion of Christian people in such glory, how he blushed to see himself overthrown everywhere; he saw the token of divine victory reared on all sides. For wherever the symbol of the Cross is set up, Christ's victory and the devil's subjection are signified. You know that our old enemy won his victory over the first man by means of a tree, and because of that held him and all his

¹ Gal. vi, 14.

issue for five thousand years under the yoke of his tyranny. But the Son came, as a strong man to the race, that He might strive with the powers of the air, and to that first tree opposed another, spewing out through the bitterness of the Cross the poisonous delight of the apple of old. When the first man, tempted by Satan, stretched out his hand to the tree, it was as if he wrote the bond of his unconditional servitude on wooden tablets. But the second Adam, stretching out His hands on the Cross, obliterated the bond of that deadly agreement. By a tree then we were enslaved; by a tree also we have been restored to our pristine freedom. By a tree we were cast out from Paradise; by a tree we are called once more to our native land. And we who because of a tree were regarded as enemies have by the mystery of the Cross been restored to friendship with God and concord with the angels, as the Apostle bears witness, when he speaks of Christ to the Ephesians: 'For he is our peace, who hath made both one, and hath broken down the middle wall of partition: having abolished in his flesh the enmity, making void even the law of commandments contained in ordinances; for to make in himself of twain one new man, so making peace, and that he might reconcile both unto God in one body by the Cross, having slain the enmity thereby.'

The law symbolized this standard of man's salvation by many figures and enigmas; all the oracles of the prophets and the authority of the old dispensation venerate it. Every page of Holy Scripture is concerned with the mystery of the Cross, and is directed towards it as to the head and source of human salvation. We think it fruitful to illustrate some of those testimonies which apply to the mystery of the Cross, that through mentioning some briefly we may give the understanding more ready access to those concerning which we are silent. Let Abraham stand forth first; for when he desired to sacrifice his son to God, he signified the whole mystery of the Lord's passion. For just as Abraham (whose name means 'highest father') did not hesitate to offer his only and beloved son to God, so the Father on high delivered up His only-begotten

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and beloved Son for our sakes. And as Isaac himself carried the wood on which he was to be laid, so Christ carried on His shoulders the wood of the Cross on which He was to suffer for our salvation. The two servants who were sent away symbolize the Jews, who, living like slaves and having knowledge only according to the flesh, could not understand the high lowliness of Christ, and did not go up into the mountain which was the place of sacrifice. There were two slaves because, as a result of Solomon's sin, the people of Israel were divided into two; of them the prophet often said: 'Backsliding Israel, and treacherous Juda.'¹ The ass used by Abraham represents the uncomprehending stupidity of the Jews. For that foolish beast bore the whole mystery, but knew not what it did. What was said to them? 'Wait here with the ass, and I and the lad will go yonder and worship, and come again to you.'² Listen to the words of the Apostle: 'Blindness in part has happened to Israel, that the fulness of the Gentiles come in, and so all Israel shall be saved.'³ 'Blindness in part has happened to Israel'—that is symbolized by 'wait here with the ass'; that the fullness of the Gentiles may come in—that is, after we have worshipped, when the fulfilled sacrifice of the Lord's Cross shall be preached to all peoples. 'And all Israel shall be saved'—that is what is meant by 'we will come again to you'.

What does the ram caught in a thicket by his horns, who was sacrificed in Isaac's place, signify? A cross has horns; if you lay two pieces of wood across one another, you get the form of a cross. That is why it was written concerning Christ: 'He had horns coming out of his hand.'⁴ The ram was caught by his horns; Christ was crucified among the sharp and wounding iniquities of the Jews, as He Himself complains in the person of Jeremiah: 'This people hath surrounded me with the thorns of its sins.' When the sacrifice was over, it was said to Abraham: 'In thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed';⁵ and after the Lord says: 'They have pierced my

¹ Jer. iii.

² Gen. xxii, 5.

³ Rom. xi, 25-26.

⁴ Hab. iii, 4.

⁵ Gen. xxii, 18.

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hands and my feet',¹ He continues: 'All the ends of the world shall remember and turn unto the Lord: and all the kindreds of the nations shall worship before thee. For the Kingdom is the Lord's and he is the governor among the nations.'² When Abraham had offered his son, and sacrificed the ram in his place, he called that place 'the Lord is seen' because our Redeemer, after He had offered Himself on the altar of the Cross and paid the debt of our death, showed Himself to the eyes of His faithful followers; and so all the redeemed may see Him now by faith, who till then had not the eyes of faith.

As we have said a good deal about Abraham and his sacrifice, we will be briefer about our other examples. Jacob symbolized the mystery of the Cross, when he spoke of Christ in his words of blessing: 'He washed his garments in wine and his clothes in the blood of grapes.'³ The garments of Christ are the multitude of the nations, in which He clothed Himself when He joined them to Himself by the grace of redemption, as the prophet promised: 'As I live, saith the Lord, thou shalt surely clothe thee with them all, as with an ornament.'⁴ The Lord washed His garments in wine and His clothes in the blood of grapes on the tree of the Cross. For then blood and water flowed from His side. The water cleansed us, the blood redeemed us, so that He might present to Himself a bride without spot or wrinkle.⁵ Again, Jacob bore clear witness to the mystery of the Cross when he preferred the young Ephraim to Manasseh the first-born, stretching his arms out over them in the form of a cross. For through the Cross the Gentiles, although lacking the right of the first-born, have precedence over the Jews. And there is a passage in Exodus which clearly refers to the mystery of the Lord's Cross. The Lord said to Moses: 'Cast the rod which thou bearest in thy hand upon the ground'; and he cast it on the ground and it became a serpent. Moses was afraid and fled from before it. And the Lord said to Moses: "Take it by the tail"; and Moses caught it and it became a rod again.⁶ We are all well aware that a serpent lured man to

¹ Ps. xxii, 16.

⁴ Isa. xlix, 18

² Ibid., 27-28.

⁵ Eph. v, 27.

³ Gen. xlix, 11.

⁶ Exod. iv, 3-4.

death. Death, then, comes from the serpent. And the rod is Christ, of whom the prophet said: 'There shall come forth a rod out of the stem of Jesse.'¹ The rod becomes a serpent; Christ dies. Moses was afraid and fled; and all the apostles were stricken with fear when they saw their dying Lord hanging on the Cross, and fled from the solid foundation of their certain hope and firm faith. The tail, being the end of the body, symbolizes the ending of the Lord's passion. Moses seized its tail, and the rod was a rod once more, and no serpent; similarly, when the Lord's passion was over and the mystery of the Cross consummated, all the faithful returned to their belief, and Christ, having destroyed death, restored Himself to His former state in the glory of His resurrection. . . .²

You will see from what I have said, brethren, that this emblem of heavenly triumph, by which the world was loosed from the bonds of her ancient captivity, was adored by the Fathers from the world's beginning, and foretold by the Prophets and prefigured on every page of the Holy Scriptures. That which we adore in grace, they venerated in faith. And we now see fulfilled, by the grace of the Mediator, what was prefigured to them in enigmas; what they predicted in spirit we can behold and embrace with our bodily eyes. O wonderful loving-kindness of our Creator! O praiseworthy humility of our Redeemer! He deigned to suffer the pains of a most cruel death, that He might win for us a crown. He chose of His own will the dreadful torments of the Cross in order to raise us from the yoke of slavery to the kingdom. He did not scorn to be cursed, so that He might free us from the law's curse. He suffered a shameful death to deliver us from the disgrace of everlasting death. So the Apostle says: 'Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us; for it is written: Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree: that the blessing of Abraham might come on the Gentiles through

¹ Isa. xi, 1.

² I have here omitted a good deal of scriptural exegesis which follows the same lines as the foregoing passages.

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Jesus Christ; that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith.¹

Since then, my brothers, we are loosed from the yoke of slavery and have, through Christ, received the blessing of Abraham, nothing remains for us to do but to preserve by the goodness of our lives the gifts of the Redeemer which we have received through grace; lest we who are reborn in Christ through baptism should, by living once more according to the old man, be condemned to damnation. Let us sing today in the church the song of David: 'They are cursed who do err from thy commandments.'² Mark this sentence well; it does not say: 'Cursed are those who are not reborn through thy sacraments' but 'who do err from thy commandments'; it is not only those who have not been reborn in Christ through the water of baptism who are threatened by the bonds of cursing, but those too whose wickedness causes them to wander from the straight path of God's commandments and to turn aside down the vicious road to ruin. Of what use is it to be delivered from the chains of the ancient curse if we renew them once more by evil living? Now, the Apostle says: 'If any man love not the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be anathema.'³ Note again that he does not say: 'If any man be not reborn in our Lord Jesus Christ' but 'if any man love Him not'; it is useless for a man reborn in Christ to have been baptized if he is not dead with Christ to his former life; he cannot be completely loosed from the chains of cursing. 'For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection';⁴ and again: 'If we suffer, we shall also reign with him; if we be dead with him we shall also live with him.'⁵ But who is he who does not love Christ? Which of us, if he were asked whether he loved Christ, would not immediately and unfailingly declare that he did? In fact, he who does not love Christ's Cross does not love Christ. And who are they who do not love Christ's Cross? St. Paul tells us quite clearly: 'Many walk, of whom I have told you often, and now

¹ Gal. iii, 13-14.

² Ps. cxix, 21.

³ 1 Cor. xvi, 22.

⁴ Rom. vi, 5.

⁵ 2 Tim. ii, 11-12.

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tell you weeping, that they are the enemies of the Cross of Christ; whose end is destruction, whose god is their belly, and whose glory is in their shame, who mind earthly things.¹ And James says: 'Whosoever is the friend of the world is the enemy of God.'²

Let him who desires to be loosed from the chains of cursing and to attain to the full blessing of new grace love the Cross, from which all the fullness of blessing flows. Let him bind himself to God's commandments by the Cross. Let him restrain the unbridled lusts of the flesh by means of the Cross. For if by yielding to the flesh we incur the sentence of damnation, by restraining it we shall deserve the grace of blessedness. From the wine-press of the Cross a great flood of blessing has flowed, which washed away all the poison of the ancient curse. From it fall drops of heavenly grace, which bring life-giving moisture to the dryness of men's spirits, and cause them to abound in the happy fruit of all the virtues. This is that cloud shaped like a man's foot-mark which appeared to Elijah in the time of drought, and which soon let fall a great rain. The Scriptures tell us of this: 'Behold there ariseth a little cloud out of the sea, like a man's foot-mark.'³ Now it is said to have arisen like a man's footprint and not like a man because it symbolizes the Cross which was fitted to the limbs of Christ. And the Cross is rightly likened to a man's footprint because by it the God-man made His departure when He returned to the Father, as John tells us: 'Jesus knew that his hour was come that he should depart out of this world unto the Father.'⁴ Now *Pasch* means 'a passing over'. And this passing over was brought about by the Cross, as the Apostle says: 'Christ our passover is sacrificed for us.' As He came down to us through a Virgin, so He returned to His own through the Cross. That miracle which Elishah worked is a symbol of this. Men were cutting down wood by the Jordan when an axe-head fell into the water. Then the prophet threw the haft into the water, and the iron floated and came back to its haft. The axe represents

¹ Phil. iii, 18-19.

³ 1 Kings xviii, 44.

² Jas. iv, 4.

⁴ John xiii, 1.

God's wisdom working through the flesh; the iron is His divinity and the wood His humanity. We may rightly use wood to symbolize the body of Christ which hung from a tree. And the axe cut down trees on the banks of the Jordan because the Wisdom of God deigned to correct the impious Jews by the severity of His preaching, standing on the banks of the river of our mortality, hewing them down like barren trees in the stiffness of their pride. So John said: 'The axe is laid unto the root of the trees: therefore every tree which bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down and cast into the fire.'¹ And when the trees were cut down, the axehead fell down from its haft, for when Truth had corrected the wild spirits of the Jews, His divinity forsook its flesh and descended to the depths of hell. But the haft was put into the water, and the axe-head returned to it; for the Lord's body, which had hung on the Cross, was placed in the sepulchre, and when His spirit returned from hell it rose again.

We must mark and most diligently consider, brethren, that our Redeemer first passed over by the Cross and so raised His humanity to the glory of the right hand of the Father. In doing so He gave us an example: where the head goes, the members must follow. We are signed with the Cross on our foreheads; it will avail even more to our salvation if we hold it in our hearts. When the angel of death saw *both* doorposts smeared with blood, he passed by instead of bursting in. Let no one rely on the mark of the cross on his forehead if he does not show forth the truth of the Cross in his works. St. Paul showed forth the Cross in his behaviour most notably, and said: 'I bear in my body the marks of the Lord Jesus.'²

Therefore, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all defilement of body or spirit; let us arm ourselves to break the assault of our enemies, the vices, let us counteract the passions of carnal pleasure, and minister lovingly to the needs of our neighbours and suffer injuries in a spirit of charity. Let our souls be free from all the burdens of earthly greeds, so that, hurled on wings of holy desire they may forsake the depths

¹ Matt. iii, 10.

² Gal. vi, 17.

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and returning to their Maker rest sweetly in His love. Let us despise all that we see and hasten with unceasing labour to that which we believe. This indeed is the Cross which we must imprint on all our actions, all our behaviour. This is the Cross which we are commanded to bear after the Lord daily. He who carries it truly shares in the passion of his Redeemer. This emblem will separate the sheep from the goats in the last judgement. And the judge, who knows not the wicked, will recognize this mark in His own. Those whom He sees marked with the seal of His own death He will, as a gracious rewarder, invite to partake in the prize of everlasting life: 'Come,' He will say, 'ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom'¹ of Him with whom He Himself lives and reigns for ever and ever. Amen.

¹ Matt. xxv, 34.

Sermon on the Holy Spirit and His Grace

Dearly beloved, we are gladdened by your request, which does you honour; the tearful complaints with which you importune us are a matter for rejoicing; for during the last few days we have, in order to lament our sins more deeply, placed our body behind a barrier of solitude and compelled our tongue to be silent. You knock, you ask, you entreat me to give you words of edification; and because I have passed the octave of Pentecost in silence you think that the well-being of your souls has suffered, since we have not held much converse concerning the coming of the Holy Spirit, as is our custom. Therefore we give thanks to the Lord to see you eager for that banquet, for we had thought you reluctant to touch it, suffering from some complaint of the spiritual stomach, and near to death. And although charity will not permit disagreement to arise among brothers, I must confess that in this matter your sorrow has given joy to my heart, your bitter sadness brought sweetness to my breast. For that same cause which has made your souls pine in sadness will bring about the joy of true salvation, as the Apostle says: 'Godly sorrow worketh repentance to salvation.'¹ But why do you, who read the homilies of the holy fathers and are daily engaged in meditation upon the scriptures, desire, surrounded as you are by the depths of such streams, to drink the unworthy water of so barren and wretched a man as I? You are impelled thereto, not by the love of knowledge which puffeth up, but by charity, which edifieth.² If I speak to you as you ask, what am I doing but repeating less eloquently

¹ 2 Cor. vii, 10.

² 1 Cor. viii, 1.

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what you have already read? But since you are so earnest in your entreaties, since you are gathered together at this holy time, and, having come out from your cells as if raised from the grave, show yourselves to my view in the joy of resurrection, I will, if you command me, and as far as divine grace allows, compose something for you in my own clumsy fashion. I would not wish to appear to fail you, so I will add a few country herbs to the rich dishes of your reading. I hope your wishes will be satisfied; for I lack eloquence and what I endeavour to write will differ from the spoken word. But where should I begin if not with the Holy Spirit, whose feast you have just celebrated, and concerning whom you complain that you have not heard me preach? We will approach our task in confidence and without fear, for He of whom we wish to speak will Himself ensure that we speak worthily.

The first thing to mark, brethren, and to strive to remember, is that without the grace of the Holy Spirit no man, however hard he struggles and strives, can rise to good works or bring forth fruit pleasing to God. A tree rooted in the earth draws its sap from the ground's moisture; this spreads through all its parts, bringing increase of strength and height and sending forth buds and twigs. All the faithful are trees in the holy grove of the Church, set there by the hand of the great Forester. Paul spoke of this planting to the Ephesians: 'He would grant you, according to the riches of his glory, to be strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man, that Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith (ye being) rooted and grounded in love.'¹ Our land, in which we send down the root of hope, is that of which the Psalmist said: 'my portion is in the land of the living';² it is the humanity of Christ, of which the same prophet says elsewhere: 'He hath established the world, that it cannot be moved.'³ If, then, we do not wish to be burned like barren trees, if we fear to be hewn down with the axe and cast into the fire, let the root of our hope cling closely in the bonds of love to the humanity of our Redeemer, to our native land, the heavenly city, that we may grow in strength and power

¹ Eph. iii, 16-17.

² Ps. cxlii, 5.

³ Ps. xciii, 1.

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and send forth the fruit of good works. But just as a tree withers if it is deprived of the moisture of the quickening sap, so our souls, unless watered by the dew of the grace of the Holy Spirit, dry up, and are unable to produce any buds of good works. For He pours light into our minds, arouses our desire and gives us strength. He gives us light, that we may see; rouses us, that we may will; strengthens us that we may bring about the good which we desire. From His richness our tears spring, through it our minds know compunction, our sins are confessed. As the soul is the life of the body, so the Holy Spirit is the life of our souls. And as the body collapses if the soul departs, so if the life-giving Spirit leaves our souls they too must die; for without His grace we cannot by any exercise of the mind come to a knowledge of God, or enter into the things of God; the Apostle bears witness to this when he says: 'The spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God.'¹ And he adds: 'For what man knoweth the things of a man, save the spirit of man which is in him? Even so the things of God knoweth no man, but the Spirit of God.'²

But do you ask, dearly beloved, how a man may know whether he has the Spirit of God? If you truly know God, then you may be sure that you have His Spirit. If, as the apostle says, no man knoweth the things of God save the Spirit of God, how can we know God unless we have His Spirit? You may, however, well wonder whether you know God. Listen to the words of the apostle John: 'He that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments is a liar.'³ He then who keeps His commandments really knows God. That is why that perfect keeper of God's commandments could safely say: 'We have received, not the spirit of the world, but the spirit which is of God.'⁴ The spirit of the world is that spirit which tempts men to scorn the divine commandments, to engage with pleasure in earthly affairs, to seek the heights of worldly dominion, to submit to the shameful passions of fleshly delight, to increase their material possessions, and to strive after power

¹ 1 Cor. ii, 10.

³ 1 John ii, 4.

² Ibid., 11.

⁴ 1 Cor. ii, 12.

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over their fellows in their swollen pride. But the Spirit which is of God urges all the souls He fills towards heavenly things, casts out the chill of negligence and of the flesh and kindles them to love of God, restrains the wanton desires of the body, and raises up the heart, having freed it from all earthly delights. By Him men are made unyielding in their scorn of material prosperity and strong in overcoming obstacles; it makes them humbly subject to the good but causes them to oppose unbendingly, by right of their free authority, those who do evil; this Spirit inebriates those whom it fills and knowingly makes them strangers to affection for our present life. And were not they truly drunk with divine sobriety of whom evil madmen said: 'These men are full of new wine'?¹ Is it not a sort of divine inebriation to despise all that is present to the senses, to scorn all that we see, and to set all the desire of our souls upon things unseen; to reject all that is soft and pleasant and freely to suffer what is harsh and difficult for love of God? We must persevere in prayer, brethren, that such drunkenness may be granted to us; we must thirst after it with the dry mouth of the spirit.

Our souls then must seek this Spirit without ceasing; by His quickening they live, by His light they see, by His teaching they know, by His leadership they come by the unhindered way of love to their native country. Let us then ask of our God, not as the poor entreat the rich of this world, for money, or food, or clothing for our naked bodies, for He who forbade us to be anxious and careful of these things knows that we have need of them; but let us implore Him to give us that which we need more than anything else, and which it most delights Him to give to those who ask for it. We must demand without ceasing that which He Himself urges us to demand and gives us certain hope of receiving. For if we ask, if we knock 'it shall be opened unto us; and our heavenly Father will give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him'.² But we who beg alms from our source of riches should, in order to receive in plenty, borrow from the poor of this world our mode of

¹ Acts ii, 13.

² Luke xi, 9, 13.

asking. For when poor men are anxious to receive something from men in high station they loosen the mouths of their wallets, and, being ready to receive, cry out as loudly as they can, so that they may, as soon as they are seen through the window, receive alms. Our wallets are our hearts; if we wish to receive into them the gifts of heavenly grace, we must empty them of the old leaven of earthly desires. And we enlarge our wallets if we long for heavenly gifts in a fire of perfect love. Paul certainly loosed the mouth of this wallet, for he said: 'O ye Corinthians, our mouth is open unto you, our heart is enlarged.'¹ And he urges them to loose it: 'Ye are not straitened in us';² and again: 'I speak as unto my children: be ye also enlarged.'³ Let us note how another poor man prepared himself to receive gifts from above; he cried, he shouted, he implored, he groaned with the voice of the spirit: 'My heart is ready, O God, my heart is ready.'⁴ It is as if he had said openly: I have prepared my heart, Lord, to receive the gifts of Your bounty, for I have cleansed it from all the filth of wicked thoughts, and there is nothing left in it which would refuse the gift of Your grace coming from above. I have striven to cast out what was evil in it; do You hasten in Your mercy to fill it with the gift of Your loving kindness. I have emptied my heart and am holding it ready for You; I have dug out all the stones of vice, and long with all my soul to embrace the grace of Your Holy Spirit. So you, God's poor, hold your hearts in readiness, who keep them clean of wicked thoughts. But unless someone from the interior of the dining hall hears you calling and pleading, no one will come to give alms to the poor. That is why David goes on to say: 'I will sing and recite a psalm to the Lord'; as if to say: I have prepared my heart, I cry aloud without ceasing, that the sound of my voice may move Thee to pity; the heart being ready, that which is given from Thy bounty will not be spilled out.

Two things are most necessary, brethren, to you who from love of solitude live as hermits, and strive after the vision of

¹ 2 Cor. vi, 11.

³ Ibid., 13.

² Ibid., 12.

⁴ Ps. lvii, 7.

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the contemplative life. You must be assiduous in singing the psalms and watchful in frequent prayer; and you must fight against the assault of invading distractions with all the might of virtue. Let us then remove all the dirt from the hospice of our hearts and strew them with all the flowers of virtue. It is God's delight to enter the tabernacle of our breasts, and to feast there on the sweet dishes of good works. And being thus prepared and adorned within, let us sing and pray and summon Him by all the supplications of our fervent spirits. So we shall fulfil the words of the prophet: 'My heart is ready O God, my heart is ready; I will sing, and recite a psalm to the Lord.' Let us earnestly beseech our Redeemer and implore Him with all our strength to visit, in His loving mercy, our hearts; to drive out from them all the darkness of sin, and enlighten them with the grace of the Holy Spirit. Thus, the Spirit who in regenerating us gave us faith in Him will lead us by a sure path to Him who with the Father and the same Holy Spirit lives and reigns for ever and ever. Amen.

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that life of perfection which had previously been regarded as the prerogative of the monk. He was, also, a poet of considerable power.

Although St. Peter Damian wrote no treatise on the contemplative life as such, his writings are filled with references to devotional and ascetic ideals, and from these it is possible to piece together his theory of contemplation. The editor, a British scholar who is preparing a critical edition of Damian's works, has chosen three of his treatises—"The Lord Be with You," "On the Perfection of Monks," and "Concerning True Happiness and Wisdom"—and four sermons which illustrate his theories most clearly.

Miss McNulty has provided in her full introduction a short biography of St. Peter Damian and an analysis of the principles underlying his spirituality. In translating from the Bible, she has used the Authorized Version, Msgr. Knox's translation of the Vulgate and, where Damian's text differs from both of these, has made her own translation.

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